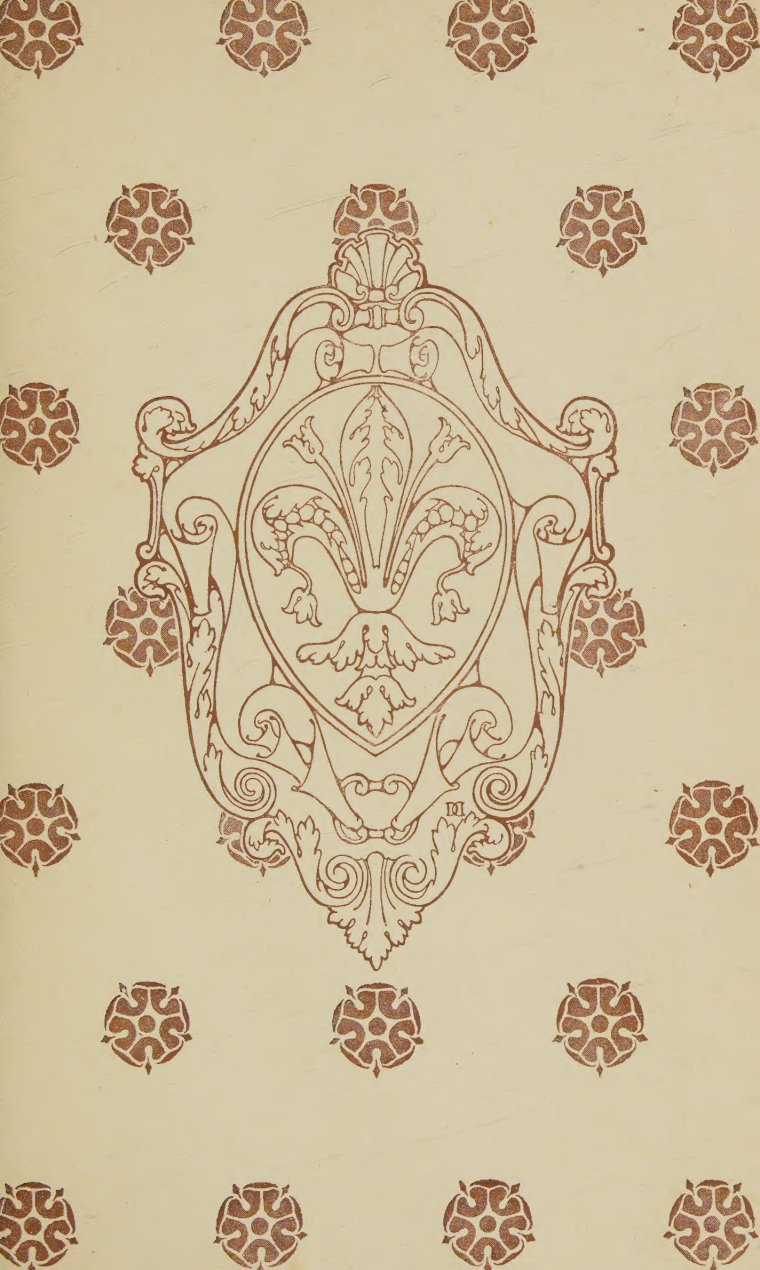

Balaustion's
Adventure
Aristophanes
Apology





Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2023 with funding from
Kahle/Austin Foundation

https://archive.org/details/balaustionsadven0006robe

# BALAUSTION'S ADVENTURE

## ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY



THE COMPLETE WORKS OF
ROBERT BROWNING

# BALAUSTION'S ADVENTURE

# ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

INTRODUCTIONS AND NOTES BY CHARLOTTE PORTER AND HELEN A. CLARKE

VOLUME VI

THOMAS Y. CROWELL CO.
PUBLISHERS : : : : NEW YORK

COPYRIGHT, 1898,
BY THOMAS Y. CROWELL & CO.

# CONTENTS


| | Page text | Page note |
|---|---|---|
| INTRODUCTION . . . . . | vii | |
| BALAUSTION'S ADVENTURE; including a Transcript from Euripides . . . . . | 1 | 283 |
| ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY; including a Transcript from Euripides: being the Last Adventure of Balaustion . . . . . | 88 | 298 |

# INTRODUCTION

One of the marks of Browning's distinctive originality is evidenced in the fact that he has, more than any other English poet, broken loose from classical traditions. With few exceptions, his themes have been chosen away from that sun-land and cloud-land of superhuman, imaginative heroism found in the Greek Mythos. He has even escaped such indirect classical influence as that which comes diluted in stories from Italian or Celtic sources, still glowing with the dimmed but persistent energy of the antique animated cosmos where brother was against brother, fathers against their children, lovers ever doomed to be parted, but where the invincible hero finally triumphed over all evil, — stories which have formed the second great quarry for the English poet. As Euripides humanized the Greek myth, so did a Chaucer, or a Shakespeare, or a Tennyson humanize the already partially humanized Romance.

That Browning might have excelled in such a rôle is amply proved in his beautiful fragment, "Artemis Prologizes," where every indication given is that he might have beaten Euripides on his own ground, and produced a drama of Hippolytus which would have combined the strength and humanness of Euripides with the lucent calm of Sophocles. But this modern Titan's revolt against the gods was so complete that the conception for

this drama he considered but the languid amusement of a sick-bed; and he regarded it so little that he forgot, when he recovered, all but the tantalizing fragment we have.

It was to have dealt with a feature of the myth not touched upon by Euripides, — the resuscitation of Hippolytus and his subsequent mad love for one of the nymphs attendant upon Artemis.

A still more remarkable piece of prologizing is the "Apollo and the Fates," the prologue to the "Parleyings," — where Browning has in the Euripidean fashion enlarged and interpreted a myth so that it may teach a moral dear to his heart, just as he himself hints is his purpose in another instance of a similar nature in the Parley "With Bernard de Mandeville":

> "A myth may teach
> Only, who better would expound it thus
> Must be Euripides, not Æschylus."

His one other lapse into classicism which may be said to be allied with that of his English contemporaries and predecessors, is in the poem "Ixion;" and this is treated more in the Shelleyan manner; that is, it is not so distinctly the humanizing of a myth as the converting of it into a symbol of a great philosophical problem. As Shelley's "Prometheus" stands for suffering humanity struggling in the bonds of sin, so does Browning's "Ixion;" and just here may be pointed out that no two poems could be chosen to emphasize more clearly the divergence of Browning from Shelley in thought. While in the "Prometheus" evil is shown to be an accident, whose only result has been to hamper mankind in its growth, in "Ixion"

evil is the result of ignorance, and is the means by which mankind climbs to larger ideals of right and wrong — a conception at once Greek and modern — while Shelley's is colored by the Persian conception, as it sifted into Christianity, of good and evil at war with each other.

In "Pheidippides" and "Echetlos" we have bits of resuscitated Greek life rather than treatments of myth, and here we strike the keynote of Browning's attitude toward classical antiquity. In those poems where he has departed from his usual custom and sought classic themes, he makes the attempt to present Greek life rather than Greek myth; to call from the past some picture showing the play of living emotion in a setting of historical incident.

"Cleon" is an example of this resuscitation of an age and mental attitude long past. It has been criticised as being un-Grecian in spirit, which simply means that it is not a picture of the joyous, reverently pagan Greece that lived in the present beauty and pleasure, content, though in a somewhat melancholy fashion, to cross the Styx when the time should come, and join the throngs of gibbering ghosts in Hades. One may doubt, sometimes, whether this devout, unquestioning, happy Greece ever existed except in the imagination of poets and scholars. Certainly their own philosophers and poets were, on the whole, an independent set of thinkers, who began to hammer away at the facts of nature as far back as Pythagoras, and to make attempts at rationalizing the gods in the historical guesses of Euhemeros, and the cosmic explanations of Theognis of Rhegium. By the time of Christ, which was the time of Cleon, the

philosophers must have undermined the Orthodox Greek religion to such an extent that no thinking Greek could have been satisfied with the old system of theology. "Cleon," is the highly developed flower of the growing centuries of critical consciousness that preceded him. Aware of the beauty of art and the joy of living, as the naïve, earlier Greek could never have been; longing for the continuance of joy such as the soul sees, but which cannot be or the gods would have revealed it, — such a Greek is the natural heir of the combined influences of the æsthetic perfection, the religious inadequacy, and the philosophical aspiration of the Greek civilization. He stands as a type of a people who have found a religion of power and beauty a failure, and who cry out for a religion of love, unwitting that the revealer of this new ideal is close at hand. Far from being un-Greek, his mental attitude is a synthesis of the many intellectual threads of Greek life, and there is nothing in his thought which will not be found to echo some hint in Greek philosopher or poet.

The infrequency of classical themes is paralleled in the poet's use of classical allusions. Lavishly scattered over the pages of "Pauline," they drop off in "Paracelsus" and "Sordello," and after that occur but rarely. The reason for this lack of classical embroidery, of which former poets have made such copious use, lies in the fact that Browning's dramatic sense led him to choose allusions not merely for the purposes of extraneous ornamentation, but as a part of the very warp and woof of the subject in hand.

Every poem has its own set of allusions either harking back to the especial phase of historic life

in which the individual character is set to "prove" his "soul," or reflecting the characteristics of the environment in which the incidents are enacted. Thus they are made the means of vitalizing the scene with the color and glow of actual life. Even in his early use of classical allusions in "Pauline," there appeared the tendency to the specializing of allusions, for he does not bring in the gods and heroes of Greece in any haphazard sort of way, because of their general and well-understood characteristics; his reference is almost always to some especial scene in a drama or poem, and thus an individualized rather than a generalized picture is brought to the mind.

The methods which resulted in his rejecting classical allusions in the greater part of his work caused him, when he did hit upon a classical subject, to make it live, also, by allusions peculiar to the theme and time. The poems already mentioned are examples of this. Such a special fitting of allusion to subject-matter makes it a necessity that the allusions should be understood, else it is like being suddenly introduced, a stranger, in the midst of friends whose talk is unintelligible because of their constantly touching upon some event or referring to some person unknown to the new-comer.

It is this sort of allusional treatment that makes the "Aristophanes' Apology" of this volume seem, when first approached, like an impenetrable wilderness to any one not familiar, or grown rusty in some of the by-ways of classical lore. Once the by-ways penetrated, a light breaks in and the poem becomes a brilliant illumination of a most interesting phase of Greek literary life.

"Balaustion's Adventure" is quite simple in

comparison with "Aristophanes' Apology," though it, too, has some allusions necessary to be understood for its proper appreciation.

The two poems should, of course, be read together, as they supplement each other in giving the complete view of Euripides and his rival and critic, Aristophanes.

During sixteen years Browning never once turned his thoughts to Greece. "Cleon" had appeared in 1855, and it seems doubtful whether he would ever have gone to Greece again for a subject of his friend, the Countess Cowper, had not suggested to him to turn his attention in that direction; and the result was "Balaustion's Adventure," and the transcript from Euripides' "Alkestis" therein contained. It is a poem absolutely unique in its beauty, wherein is included the reflection of the ancient attitude at home and abroad toward Euripides, an interpretation as well as a translation of one of Euripides' most interesting dramas, and the creation of the fascinating personality of Balaustion. About this girl the fancy loves to cling, — so joyous, brave, and beautiful is she, and possessed of so rare a mind, scintillating with wit, wisdom, and critical insight; not Browning's own mind, either, as those who have always seen Browning behind his creations have said. Her ardor for purity and perfection is perhaps peculiarly feminine. It is quite different from that of the mind tormented by the problem of evil and taking refuge in a partisanship of evil as a force which works for good, and without which the world would be a sorry waste of insipidity. Her suggested version of the Alkestis story converts Admetos into as much of a saint as Alkestis, and makes an

exquisite, soul-stirring romance of their perfect union; but it must be admitted that it would do away with all the intensity and dramatic force of the play as it is presented by Euripides. Like the angels who rejoice more over the one sinner returned than over the ninety-and-nine that did not go astray, an artist prefers the contrast and movement of a sinning and regenerated Admetos to that of one more suited from the first to be the consort of Alkestis.

It is very fitting that Browning should have chosen to make a woman the heroine of the historic incident wherein was saved the shipload of Athenian sympathizers by recitations from Euripides, and the enthusiastic defender of him. This is in itself a subtle defence of him against the charge so often brought, that he was a hater of women, — a charge perfectly incomprehensible to us now, in view of his gallery of women portraits, where, as some one has recently said, he makes us sympathize even with the bad ones, — the Phædras and Medeas. He has, it is true, made some of his men rail against women; but why such a passage as that expressing the opinion of Hippolytus against women should be taken as an index of the dramatist's opinion, rather than his sympathetic portraiture of fine womanly traits, it is hard to understand. Probably criticism found it easier to follow in the wake of Aristophanes' unappreciative strictures than to investigate for itself the true state of the case. Another reason why he should have chosen a woman lies in the fact that Mrs. Browning was an enthusiastic admirer of Euripides; and a third reason is that the picturesque possibilities of the "lyric girl" were far ahead of anything which

could have been accomplished by a young man placed in the same position. All these artistic reasons are sufficient to overbalance any suspicion that such a figure as Balaustion might not have been possible in a civilization where, from all we can learn, women of the best class had too little freedom to allow of their taking any such part in affairs as Balaustion took. However, when it is recollected how many hints there are in Greek literature, if not in Greek laws, referring to a time when women in Greece enjoyed greater political freedom than they do even now; also, that Balaustion's time was the age that gave rise to such conceptions of freedom for women as Plato brought forward in his "Republic," it is quite within the range of probability that there already existed men and women sufficiently independent to make their own rules of social life, and that Balaustion may be actually as well as poetically justified.

The translation of the "Alkestis," which is the real *raison d'être* of the poem, has received unstinted praise from critics of the classics. Mahaffy, among others, considers it by far the best translation that has been made, but regrets that Browning did not turn the choral odes into lyric verse; an objection Arthur Symons meets in pointing out that the scheme of the poem — namely, the telling of it as a connected narrative by Balaustion — did not admit of such lyrical translation of the choruses.

Absolute literalness is the characteristic of the translation. To quote from Symons again, "Not merely is Mr. Browning literal in the sense of following the original word for word; he gives the exact root-meaning of words which a literal trans-

lator would consider himself justified in taking in their general sense. Occasionally, a literality of this sort is less easily intelligible to the general reader than the more obvious word would have been; but, save in a very few instances, the whole translation is not less clear and forcible than it is exact."

As has been frequently remarked, however, it is much more than a translation: it is an interpretation of the art and moral of Euripides' play, and most of all it is a revival of it as an acting drama; for Balaustion does not describe and criticise the play merely as a literary production, she describes it as she saw it acted. Thus speech is constantly illuminated by exquisite pictures of the action; as, for example, in the passage, —

"And, in the fire-flash of the appalling sword,
The uprush and the outburst, the onslaught
Of Death's portentous passage through the door,
Apollon stood a pitying moment-space:
I caught one last gold gaze upon the night
Nearing the world now; and the God was gone,
And mortals left to deal with misery,
As in came stealing slow, now this, now that
Old sojourner throughout the country side,
Servants grown friends to those unhappy here."

The chief point to be noticed in Balaustion's interpretation is that she regards all the actors in the drama from an eminently human point of view, as beings entirely responsible for their own acts, and not to be excused on the ground that Fate has them in its clutches. So she sees Admetos as he is, an utterly selfish soul, and, like most people of that nature, so unconscious of his selfishness

that he considers himself much to be pitied for his misfortunes, — entirely blind to the fact that they emanate from his own selfish weakness. He does not bemoan the fate of Alkestis doomed to so early a death, but the fate of himself deprived of such a wife. She seizes, too, upon all those indications in the speech and attitude of Alkestis that show how well she understands her husband's nature, and how much valuation she places upon his protestations of love. Her keen wit scorns the dull servility of the chorus that never by any chance indulges in an independent judgment.

These things are so self-evident to the present-day reader of Euripides, that it seems almost incomprehensible that they could have been seen in any other light; but even yet defenders, like Professor Moulton, can be found for Admetos, on the score that he was a helpless mortal in the hands of Fate, that public sentiment would have approved of his being saved at any price for the sake of the state, and that the Greek attitude of mind toward old people quite justified the disgust of Admetos that his parents were not willing to give up life for him. Even if such were the state of public opinion, a defence of Admetos based upon it entirely overlooks the fact that Euripides was the conscious critic of his time, and was fully alive to the fact that the shibboleths of the past could not forever be the guides to human action.

The sympathy with Herakles in his cups is another very penetrating piece of criticism on Balaustion's part. She recognizes the difference between evil which is of the very nature, like that of Admetos, who was yet perfectly correct in all his outward actions, and evil which is an external acci-

dent, like Herakles' joy in his feasting as long as his mind was free, — which did not touch the large, sympathetic nature of the man at all; for as soon as he realized the sorrow, his pleasures were dropped and he set about helping his friend. There are still critics who take exception to Browning's glorification of Herakles in this play. They cannot get over the fact of Herakles' boisterous enjoyment, — cannot distinguish, as Balaustion did, between practices that were the outgrowth of the religious orgies of the age and did not touch the hero's true nature, and actual sin. It is surely straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel to object to Herakles' little spree and at the same time accept Falstaff, who is ten times more gross, as the most inimitable of humorous portrayals.

It is a matter of historical record that Euripides was appreciated everywhere better than he was in Athens. Browning has made Balaustion the mouthpiece of this widespread appreciation. Her defence of him is not that of a grave critic weighing the influences that may have shaped his genius, or calculating the pros and cons of his style; it is rather indirectly implied in the ardor of her enthusiasm for this "sweetest, saddest song," and her swift intuitions of the truth in regard to the penetrating delineation of character. As we have already hinted, her own proposed version is a crowning touch of dramatic skill in its purity, its ideality, and especially in its ennobling of Admetos. With just such an ending a girl with a newly acquired sense of the nobility of men, realized in Euthukles, might delight to honor her thought of him.

"Aristophanes' Apology" opens with one of those vivid pictures with which Browning some-

times fascinates the attention. It is Balaustion's description of the fall of Athens in 406 B. C., and is, in consequence, colored by the intense feeling of one overwhelmed with grief at the hideous destruction she has witnessed. The city so well beloved, once the home of her cherished poet Euripides, has met a fate too well deserved, but none the less piteous. To this city, which had made life unbearable for its most serious poet, and given its allegiance to the high-priest of mockery and sensuality, had come a fitting retribution, when its destruction was accomplished to the music and dancing of its own flute-girls, and Comedy instead of accomplishing for Athens the victory and peace Aristophanes had claimed that it would, in the person of the flute-girls danced it to ruin. The antithesis here between Euripides dead, who might have saved, and the spirit of Aristophanes helping the destroyer, strikes the key-note of Balaustion's attitude toward these two men as revealed in the poem. From this scene she goes back to the incident of a year ago; and in her elaboration of it not only Aristophanes himself, but the literary and political Athens of that day are conjured into being. Balaustion is supposed to dictate this second adventure of hers to her husband, Euthukles, as they make the voyage from the doomed city to their island-home Rhodes. Her story, however, is so graphically told that we forget all about this paraphernalia of recitation and dictation, and become lost in the scene.

The figure of Aristophanes is brought before us in a few telling strokes, as, surrounded by his rollicking actors and chorus, he breaks in upon the reverent quietude of Balaustion and her hus-

band, about to honor Euripides by a reading of his play. The better nature of Aristophanes had been touched at the news of the death of Euripides; but the circumstance of his followers at the feast mistaking his genuine emotion of admiration toward Euripides for a crowning example of his satire has diverted his better impulse, and now his one desire is to vindicate himself against Euripides. His apology for himself is as remarkable a piece of character creation as Browning has ever produced. Atmosphere has been given by making use of every available hint as to the literary life of the time, which centred itself in dramatic performances. Besides their literary character, these dramatic performances were regarded as part of the ceremonial of religion, and dramatic contests were held at the festivals in honor of Dionusos. Aristophanes constantly refers to the contests of this kind in which he had either taken the prize or had been beaten by some one of his rivals in Comedy. By means of these glimpses it is made evident how keen the competition had become, — so keen, in fact, that Aristophanes catered more and more to the lowest public sentiment rather than run the risk of losing the prize. The taste of the people for damaging personalities, and the desire of rivals in comedy to supply the people with what they wanted as well as wreak their own personal spite upon their enemies, grew so that it is no wonder the Archons were forced from time to time to make laws against such personalities, much to the chagrin of Aristophanes, who is loud in his complaints of these laws, as he is of the economy which would curtail the accoutrements of the chorus for the sake of war preparations. He also gives us

glimpses every now and then of Euripides moving serene and apart from all this turmoil of competition, following his genius to whatsoever heights it might lead him, regardless of the approbation of the multitude, and smiling with his friend Socrates when the prize was awarded to some very inferior writer of Tragedy. We see, furthermore, the democracy that is fast going to seed, with no longer any pretensions to be a government by the people, but become a leadership of demagogues anxious to aggrandize themselves. Aristophanes is to be sympathized with for objecting to this sort of rule, but he would have put in its place a leadership of those fit to rule according to aristocratic ideals rather than a better democracy.

Against this background of general life shown by means of Aristophanes' constant references to the scenes in which he lives, his personality stands out apart. He is seen to be a man of complex nature, conservative in his religion, that is, orthodox, with none of the doubts about the gods which were then rampant, and at the same time with moral standards behind the most advanced thought. His orthodox bias prevents him also from having any faith in democracy, or any intellectual sympathy with the new scientific and philosophical theories brought forward by the thinkers; yet his mind is alert enough when he is on his own ground, and strong in the conviction of the truthfulness of its own theories. Notwithstanding he is so passionately partisan, he has the true artist's susceptibility to beauty even of the loftier kinds, and sometimes softens under its magical influence as he did before the solemn presence of Sophokles at the Archon's feast or in the radiant light of Balaus-

tion's golden eyes. His susceptibility to emotional influences causes his moods to veer between an attitude of intolerance that vents itself in vindictive vituperation of those whose theories are opposed to his, and one in which he makes really earnest attempts to present logical reasons for the faith that is in him. Vanity is another of his characteristics. It hurts when Euripides takes no notice of the onslaughts against him.

So much for his personality and his environment, but what of his argument? Denuded of its dramatic setting, it amounts to this: As to his devoting his energies to the creation of a new sort of drama, such as Euripides and Balaustion think him capable of, he declares that he does not claim to be a reformer in any sense of the word, but only to improve upon that which has already been invented. Comedy is justified because of its ancient origin. Its characteristic had always been to tell the truth, that is, to show vice its own color by making game of it, and it is therefore coeval with the birth of freedom. He aims only to enlarge its prerogatives by bringing under its lash a larger number of victims, and striking at the high as well as the low. As for his methods, he considers that the way to bring a truth home to the populace is not by talking against the evil, but by making the person whose name is connected with any abuse a target for ridicule. Therefore, as he does not approve of the dramatic methods of Euripides, he ridicules him as a man; as he believes in peace, he makes fun of the warrior Lamachus; and as he does not believe in the doctrines of the philosophers, he shows up Socrates in an amusing light. All this falls in with his philosophy of life, which is

to enjoy and be merry; thus, instead of talking about peace, as Euripides does, and showing the tragic effects of sin, he enlarges on the enjoyments of sense, the feasting and merriment to be secured in times of peace. He defends his philosophy of life on the ground that he does not believe in the suppression of sense, but rather in the perfect adjustment of sense and soul. Finally, through presenting the evil and making it laughable, he claims that he suggests by contrast the superiority of the good. And upon this ground he even justifies himself for ridiculing the gods themselves, because by daring to make them absurd he suggests how entirely beyond ridicule they are. Thus he attains to the highest pinnacle of wit and humor. As a proof that his methods are the right ones for the correction of evils, he declares that peaceful and better times are dawning for Athens, which has been taught by his Comedies.

Such arguments as these are logical enough when Aristophanes' standpoint is taken into consideration, but they do not appeal to Balaustion, with her entirely different view of life.

It will be noticed that she replies at first, not by attacking his arguments, but by impugning the truth of his statements. Freedom, she claims, came into existence before Comedy, and upon his own showing he has improved upon his predecessors in Comedy to such an extent that it is equivalent to his having himself invented Comedy; therefore he cannot call upon precedent as an argument in favor of his methods, his work must stand or fall upon its merits. She doubts whether his Comedies have been such a means of teaching the people as he avers, for Euripides had dared and done much

before Aristophanes appeared upon the scene, — had sung of peace, for example, and had struck out directly against wrong and conscientiously loved the good. And furthermore, his Comedy had accomplished none of the reforms claimed for it by Aristophanes, which proves that the means he employs for showing up abuses may cause a laugh but do not correct them. The reason for this lies in the fact that his methods are not those of truth. Not only does he strike at evil with weapons that go aside from the mark, but he completely loses sight of his underlying virtuous purpose by falling into coarse forms of wit and satire for their own sole sake, of which "The Thesmophoriasusai" is an example. The charge against the sincerity of his methods, to which is added the charge against the sincerity of his purpose, is the strongest point made by Balaustion; but her victory is not so much one of argument in which the fallacies of Aristophanes' position are pointed out, it is rather a victory won by bringing countercharges to show that he does not even live up to the principles he enunciates. Through all Balaustion's talk breathes out her profound admiration of Euripides, and her indignation at Aristophanes' slanderous attacks upon his art and his morals. According to her notion, the strongest argument she can bring to bear upon Aristophanes is to read to him a play of Euripides.

The translation of the "Herakles" has been as much admired for its accuracy as that of the "Alkestis." It is considered a remarkably truthful rendering of the Greek thought, and of the word-force of the Greek language, though not a perfect reflection of Greek style.

To the general reader, the Greek spelling of all Greek proper names used has at first a confusing effect, and words which are perfectly familiar in their ordinary English transliteration look uncanny with the English "c" completely banished and a strange assortment of vowel combinations. For this unusual departure from custom Browning was at first censured severely. It requires, however, no very great amount of penetration even on the part of the unscholastic to discover the laws which govern the substitution of the vowels used in the Greek for those ordinarily used in the English spelling, and on the whole it is a reform which tends to simplification. There is no reason why the brain should be lumbered up with half-a-dozen different spellings of proper names. It would be better to adopt the spelling of the language in whose literature or history the proper name occurs, and spell it that way, no matter in what language one is writing. We are now in a transitional stage, in which we tend strongly toward using the Greek kappa in place of our own "c," but fight shy of "u" in place of "y" or "oi" in place of "œ." "Poikilé" seems so different from "Pœcile" that we can only bring ourselves to write it with difficulty. The sooner we get over the chaos of a partially Greek and a partially English spelling, the sooner one more cause of mental worry and argumentation over a small matter will be eliminated; and Browning in his unconcerned following of his own devices has helped toward this happy consummation.

The value of the poem as a criticism of Aristophanes and Euripides has been somewhat questioned by John Addington Symonds, who says, in speaking of it: "As a sophist and a rhetorician of

poetry, Mr. Browning proves himself unrivalled, and takes rank with the best writers of historical romances. Yet students may fairly accuse him of some special pleading in favor of his friends and against his foes. It is true that Aristophanes did not bring back again the golden days of Greece; true that his comedy revealed a corruption latent in Athenian life. But neither was Euripides in any sense a saviour. Impartiality regards them both as equally destructive, — Aristophanes, because he indulged animalism and praised ignorance in an age which ought to have outgrown both; Euripides, because he criticised the whole fabric of Greek thought and feeling in an age which had not yet distinguished between analysis and scepticism.

"What has just been said about Mr. Browning's special pleading indicates the chief fault to be found with his poem. The point of view is modern. The situation is strained. Aristophanes becomes the scapegoat of Athenian sins, while Euripides shines forth a saint as well as a sage. Balaustion, for her part, beautiful as her conception truly is, takes up a position which even Plato could not have assumed. Into her mouth Mr. Browning has put the views of the most searching and most sympathetic modern analyst. She judges Euripides, not as he appeared to his own Greeks, but as he strikes the warmest of admirers who compare his work with that of all the poets who have ever lived."

This criticism, penetrating as it is, and weighty because of Mr. Symonds' undoubted right to an opinion on any classical subject, yet certainly makes the mistake of regarding Balaustion simply

as the critical mouthpiece of Browning. It is undoubtedly true that she does not do justice to Aristophanes. She does not realize, with Mr. Symonds, that his plays were "a radiant and pompous show, by which the genius of the Greek race chose, as it were in bravado, to celebrate an apotheosis of the animal functions of humanity." Such a view would be possible only to the modern critic, while Balaustion's is due partly to her partisanship for Euripides, partly to her nature, which was singularly pure, and revolted at the coarseness of Aristophanes, as only a contemporary unable to grasp the larger historical aspect of his genius could. Why should there be anything so improbable in the thought of the existence of such an attitude on the part of a woman at that time? Women of high ideals and pure natures shed their light abroad in the great Greek tragedies, and one may feel sure they were not conjured up from any idle brain-fancies, but owed their existence to an actual acquaintanceship with women of flesh and blood. To such women Aristophanes would be abhorrent. They would not be able to regard his faults philosophically, as the inevitable outcome of a civilization balancing between decay and regeneration. Yet even Balaustion, with all her detestation of his methods, pays tribute to the genius of Aristophanes, thus proving herself capable of distinguishing between the power she reverences and the form she loathes.

On the other hand, is not the excusatory attitude of the modern critic toward Aristophanes implied tacitly in the arguments Browning puts into the mouth of Aristophanes? It comes out especially in that strange combination of a frank belief in a

life of the senses going along with a puritanical reverence for the gods, and a hatred of anything that falls within his definition of vice, which is the chief characteristic of Aristophanes as he presents his own case. Thus Browning portrays the character in such a manner as to intimate that he considers him to reflect an undeveloped phase of morals then existing, for which he was not responsible, because the higher light had not broken in upon him.

It is not just, either, to represent Browning as the defender of Euripides to the extent of presenting him as a great benefactor of his age. On the contrary, Balaustion herself, with all her devotion to his genius, sees that he has not been successful, in the narrow sense, of convincing his age, or saving Athens from the decay that had set in. She declares that only the future will reveal truly what the influence of Euripides has been; and until that future shall settle the question, Euripides is equally a failure with Aristophanes, as far as he has had any deterring effect on the vices of the time. Her prophetic instinct that he is the forerunner of greater things in the drama, and that his spirit is destined to live, may be improbable, though it should be remembered that Aristophanes himself made an approach to the new form imagined by Balaustion, in his "Plutos," which, with the plays produced by Philemon and Menander, may be said to have bridged the way to Shakespeare, who would have filled Balaustion's requirements.

Like all dramatic work, this poem aims to present the actual spirit if the time in which the actors moved upon the stage of life, and to reproduce something of their mental and emotional

natures. Any criticism of the poets who figure in the poem, or of the larger question of the quarrel between Tragedy and Comedy should be deduced indirectly, as implied in the sympathetic presentation of both sides, and not based upon direct expressions of opinion by either side. So regarded, it would seem that Browning was able to appreciate the genius of Aristophanes as well as that of Euripides, but that he considered Aristophanes to have value chiefly in relation to his age, as the artistic mouthpiece of its long-established usages, while Euripides had caught the breath of the future, and was the mirror of the prophetic impulses of his age, rather than of its dominant civilization.

Artistically the poem is rounded out by Balaustion's referring again at the end to the scene of Athens' fall, and adding one more picture, that of the man from Phokis, who stayed the barbarous hand of the conqueror for a day by reciting a chorus from Euripides. The identifying of the historic man from Phokis with Balaustion's husband is a happy illustration of the combination of the historical and imaginative, as it is seen working throughout the poem in making live again this momentous period of Greek life and literary art.

Charlotte Porter.
Helen A. Clarke.

# BALAUSTION'S ADVENTURE

INCLUDING

## A TRANSCRIPT FROM EURIPIDES

1871

### TO THE COUNTESS COWPER

If I mention the simple truth: that this poem absolutely owes its existence to you, — who not only suggested, but imposed on me as a task, what has proved the most delightful of May-month amusements — I shall seem honest, indeed, but hardly prudent; for, how good and beautiful ought such a poem to be!

Euripides might fear little; but I, also, have an interest in the performance; and what wonder if I beg you to suffer that it make, in another and far easier sense, its nearest possible approach to those Greek qualities of goodness and beauty, by laying itself gratefully at your feet?

R. B.

LONDON: *July 23, 1871.*

Our Euripides, the human,
With his droppings of warm tears,
And his touches of things common
Till they rose to touch the spheres.

ABOUT that strangest, saddest, sweetest song
I, when a girl, heard in Kameiros once,
And, after, saved my life by? Oh, so glad
To tell you the adventure!
Petalé,
Phullis, Charopé, Chrusion! You must know,

This "after" fell in that unhappy time
When poor reluctant Nikias, pushed by fate,
Went falteringly against Syracuse;
And there shamed Athens, lost her ships and men,
And gained a grave, or death without a grave.
I was at Rhodes — the isle, not Rhodes the town,
Mine was Kameiros — when the news arrived:
Our people rose in tumult, cried "No more
Duty to Athens, let us join the League
And side with Sparta, share the spoil, — at worst,
Abjure a headship that will ruin Greece!"
And so, they sent to Knidos for a fleet
To come and help revolters. Ere help came, —
Girl as I was, and never out of Rhodes
The whole of my first fourteen years of life,
But nourished with Ilissian mother's-milk, —
I passionately cried to who would hear
And those who loved me at Kameiros — "No!
Never throw Athens off for Sparta's sake —
Never disloyal to the life and light
Of the whole world worth calling world at all!
Rather go die at Athens, lie outstretched
For feet to trample on, before the gate
Of Diomedes or the Hippadai,
Before the temples and among the tombs,
Than tolerate the grim felicity
Of harsh Lakonia! Ours the fasts and feasts,
Choës and Chutroi; ours the sacred grove,
Agora, Dikasteria, Poikilé,
Pnux, Keramikos; Salamis in sight,
Psuttalia, Marathon itself, not far!
Ours the great Dionusiac theatre,
And tragic triad of immortal fames,
Aischulos, Sophokles, Euripides!
To Athens, all of us that have a soul,

Follow me!" And I wrought so with my prayer,
That certain of my kinsfolk crossed the straight
And found a ship at Kaunos; well-disposed
Because the Captain — where did he draw breath
First but within Psuttalia? Thither fled
A few like-minded as ourselves. We turned
The glad prow westward, soon were out at sea,
Pushing, brave ship with the vermilion cheek,
Proud for our heart's true harbor. But a wind
Lay ambushed by Point Malea of bad fame,
And leapt out, bent us from our course. Next day
Broke stormless, so broke next blue day and next.
"But whither bound in this white waste?" we plagued
The pilot's old experience: "Cos or Crete?"
Because he promised us the land ahead.
While we strained eyes to share in what he saw,
The Captain's shout startled us; round we rushed:
What hung behind us but a pirate-ship
Panting for the good prize! "Row! harder row!
Row for dear life!" the Captain cried: "'t is Crete,
Friendly Crete looming large there! Beat this craft
That 's but a keles, one-benched pirate-bark,
Lokrian, or that bad breed off Thessaly!
Only, so cruel are such water-thieves,
No man of you, no woman, child, or slave,
But falls their prey, once let them board our boat!"
So, furiously our oarsmen rowed and rowed;
And when the oars flagged somewhat, dash and dip,
As we approached the coast and safety, so
That we could hear behind us plain the threats
And curses of the pirate panting up
In one more throe and passion of pursuit, —
Seeing our oars flag in the rise and fall,
I sprang upon the altar by the mast

And sang aloft, — some genius prompting me, —
That song of ours which saved at Salamis:
"O sons of Greeks, go, set your country free,
Free your wives, free your children, free the fanes
O' the Gods, your fathers founded, — sepulchres
They sleep in! Or save all, or all be lost!"
Then, in a frenzy, so the noble oars
Churned the black water white, that well away
We drew, soon saw land rise, saw hills grow up,
Saw spread itself a sea-wide town with towers,
Not fifty stadia distant; and, betwixt
A large bay and a small, the islet-bar,
Even Ortugia's self — oh, luckless we!
For here was Sicily and Syracuse:
We ran upon the lion from the wolf.
Ere we drew breath, took counsel, out there came
A galley, hailed us. "Who asks entry here
In war-time? Are you Sparta's friend or foe?"
"Kaunians" — our Captain judged his best reply,
"The mainland-seaport that belongs to Rhodes;
Rhodes that casts in her lot now with the League,
Forsaking Athens, — you have heard belike!"
"Ay, but we heard all Athens in one ode
Just now! we heard her in that Aischulos!
You bring a boatful of Athenians here,
Kaunians although you be: and prudence bids,
For Kaunos' sake, why, carry them unhurt
To Kaunos, if you will: for Athens' sake,
Back must you, though ten pirates blocked the bay!
We want no colony from Athens here,
With memories of Salamis, forsooth,
To spirit up our captives, that pale crowd
I' the quarry, whom the daily pint of corn
Keeps in good order and submissiveness."
Then the gray Captain prayed them by the Gods,

And by their own knees, and their fathers' beards,
They should not wickedly thrust suppliants back,
But save the innocent on traffic bound —
Or, may be, some Athenian family
Perishing of desire to die at home, —
From that vile foe still lying on its oars,
Waiting the issue in the distance. Vain!
Words to the wind! And we were just about
To turn and face the foe, as some tired bird
Barbarians pelt at, drive with shouts away
From shelter in what rocks, however rude,
She makes for, to escape the kindled eye,
Split beak, crook'd claw o' the creature, cormorant
Or ossifrage, that, hardly baffled, hangs
Afloat i' the foam, to take her if she turn.
So were we at destruction's very edge,
When those o' the galley, as they had discussed
A point, a question raised by somebody,
A matter mooted in a moment, — "Wait!"
Cried they (and wait we did, you may be sure).
"That song was veritable Aischulos,
Familiar to the mouth of man and boy,
Old glory: how about Euripides?
The newer and not yet so famous bard,
He that was born upon the battle-day
While that song and the salpinx sounded him
Into the world, first sound, at Salamis —
Might you know any of his verses too?"

Now, some one of the Gods inspired this speech:
Since ourselves knew what happened but last year —
How, when Gulippos gained his victory
Over poor Nikias, poor Demosthenes,
And Syracuse condemned the conquered force
To dig and starve i' the quarry, branded them —

Freeborn Athenians, brute-like in the front
With horse-head brands, — ah, "Region of the Steed"! —
Of all these men immersed in misery,
It was found none had been advantaged so
By aught in the past life he used to prize
And pride himself concerning, — no rich man
By riches, no wise man by wisdom, no
Wiser man still (as who loved more the Muse)
By storing, at brain's edge and tip of tongue,
Old glory, great plays that had long ago
Made themselves wings to fly about the world, —
Not one such man was helped so at his need
As certain few that (wisest they of all)
Had, at first summons, oped heart, flung door wide
At the new knocking of Euripides,
Nor drawn the bolt with who cried "Decadence!
And, after Sophokles, be nature dumb!"
Such, — and I see in it God Bacchos' boon
To souls that recognized his latest child,
He who himself, born latest of the Gods,
Was stoutly held impostor by mankind, —
Such were in safety: any who could speak
A chorus to the end, or prologize,
Roll out a rhesis, wield some golden length
Stiffened by wisdom out into a line,
Or thrust and parry in bright monostich,
Teaching Euripides to Syracuse —
Any such happy man had prompt reward:
If he lay bleeding on the battle-field
They stanched his wounds and gave him drink and food;
If he were slave i' the house, for reverence
They rose up, bowed to who proved master now,
And bade him go free, thank Euripides!

Ay, and such did so: many such, he said,
Returning home to Athens, sought him out,
The old bard in the solitary house,
And thanked him ere they went to sacrifice.
I say, we knew that story of last year!

Therefore, at mention of Euripides,
The Captain crowed out, "Euoi, praise the God!
Oöp, boys, bring our owl-shield to the fore!
Out with our Sacred Anchor! Here she stands,
Balaustion! Strangers, greet the lyric girl!
Euripides? Babai! what a word there 'scaped
Your teeth's enclosure, quoth my grandsire's song!
Why, fast as snow in Thrace, the voyage through,
Has she been falling thick in flakes of him!
Frequent as figs at Kaunos, Kaunians said.
Balaustion, stand forth and confirm my speech!
Now it was some whole passion of a play;
Now, peradventure, but a honey-drop
That slipt its comb i' the chorus. If there rose
A star, before I could determine steer
Southward or northward — if a cloud surprised
Heaven, ere I fairly hollaed 'Furl the sail! —'
She had at fingers' end both cloud and star;
Some thought that perched there, tame and tunable,
Fitted with wings; and still, as off it flew,
'So sang Euripides,' she said, 'so sang
The meteoric poet of air and sea,
Planets and the pale populace of heaven,
The mind of man, and all that 's made to soar!'
And so, although she has some other name,
We only call her Wild-pomegranate-flower,
Balaustion; since, where'er the red bloom burns
I' the dull dark verdure of the bounteous tree,

Dethroning, in the Rosy Isle, the rose,
You shall find food, drink, odor, all at once;
Cool leaves to bind about an aching brow,
And, never much away, the nightingale.
Sing them a strophe, with the turn-again,
Down to the verse that ends all, proverb-like,
And save us, thou Balaustion, bless the name!"

But I cried "Brother Greek! better than so, —
Save us, and I have courage to recite
The main of a whole play from first to last;
That strangest, saddest, sweetest song of his,
Alkestis; which was taught, long years ago
At Athens, in Glaukinos' archonship,
But only this year reached our Isle o' the Rose.
I saw it, at Kameiros, played the same,
They say, as for the right Lenean feast
In Athens; and beside the perfect piece —
Its beauty and the way it makes you weep, —
There is much honor done your own loved God
Herakles, whom you house i' the city here
Nobly, the Temple wide Greece talks about!
I come a suppliant to your Herakles!
Take me and put me on his temple-steps
To tell you his achievement as I may,
And, that told, he shall bid you set us free!"

Then, because Greeks are Greeks, and hearts are hearts,
And poetry is power, — they all outbroke
In a great joyous laughter with much love:
"Thank Herakles for the good holiday!
Make for the harbor! Row, and let voice ring,
'In we row, bringing more Euripides!'"
All the crowd, as they lined the harbor now,

"More of Euripides!" — took up the cry.
We landed; the whole city, soon astir,
Came rushing out of gates in common joy
To the suburb temple; there they stationed me
O' the topmost step: and plain I told the play,
Just as I saw it; what the actors said,
And what I saw, or thought I saw the while,
At our Kameiros theatre, clean-scooped
Out of a hill-side, with the sky above
And sea before our seats in marble row:
Told it, and, two days more, repeated it,
Until they sent us on our way again
With good words and great wishes.
Oh, for me —
A wealthy Syracusan brought a whole
Talent and bade me take it for myself:
I left it on the tripod in the fane,
— For had not Herakles a second time
Wrestled with Death and saved devoted ones? —
Thank-offering to the hero. And a band
Of captives, whom their lords grew kinder to
Because they called the poet countryman,
Sent me a crown of wild-pomegranate-flower:
So, I shall live and die Balaustion now.
But one — one man — one youth, — three days, each day, —
(If, ere I lifted up my voice to speak,
I gave a downward glance by accident)
Was found at foot o' the temple. When we sailed,
There, in the ship too, was he found as well,
Having a hunger to see Athens too.
We reached Peiraieus; when I landed — lo,
He was beside me. Anthesterion-month
Is just commencing: when its moon rounds full,
We are to marry. O Euripides!

I saw the master: when we found ourselves
(Because the young man needs must follow me)
Firm on Peiraieus, I demanded first
Whither to go and find him. Would you think?
The story how he saved us made some smile:
They wondered strangers were exorbitant
In estimation of Euripides.
He was not Aischulos nor Sophokles:
— "Then, of our younger bards who boast the bay,
Had I sought Agathon, or Iophon,
Or, what now had it been Kephisophon?
A man that never kept good company,
The most unsociable of poet-kind,
All beard that was not freckle in his face!"

I soon was at the tragic house, and saw
The master, held the sacred hand of him
And laid it to my lips. Men love him not:
How should they? Nor do they much love his friend
Sokrates: but those two have fellowship:
Sokrates often comes to hear him read,
And never misses if he teach a piece.
Both, being old, will soon have company,
Sit with their peers above the talk. Meantime,
He lives as should a statue in its niche;
Cold walls enclose him, mostly darkness there,
Alone, unless some foreigner uncouth
Breaks in, sits, stares an hour, and so departs,
Brain-stuffed with something to sustain his life,
Dry to the marrow 'mid much merchandise.
How should such know and love the man?
Why, mark!
Even when I told the play and got the praise,
There spoke up a brisk little somebody,
Critic and whippersnapper, in a rage

To set things right: "The girl departs from truth!
Pretends she saw what was not to be seen,
Making the mask of the actor move, forsooth!
'Then a fear flitted o'er the wife's white face,' —
'Then frowned the father,' — 'then the husband shook,' —
'Then from the festal forehead slipt each spray,
And the heroic mouth's gay grace was gone;' —
As she had seen each naked fleshly face,
And not the merely-painted mask it wore!"
Well, is the explanation difficult?
What 's poetry except a power that makes?
And, speaking to one sense, inspires the rest,
Pressing them all into its service; so
That who sees painting, seems to hear as well
The speech that 's proper for the painted mouth;
And who hears music, feels his solitude
Peopled at once — for how count heart-beats plain
Unless a company, with hearts which beat,
Come close to the musician, seen or no?
And who receives true verse at eye or ear,
Takes in (with verse) time, place, and person too,
So, links each sense on to its sister-sense,
Grace-like: and what if but one sense of three
Front you at once? The sidelong pair conceive
Thro' faintest touch of finest finger-tips, —
Hear, see and feel, in faith's simplicity,
Alike, what one was sole recipient of:
Who hears the poem, therefore, sees the play.

Enough and too much! Hear the play itself!
Under the grape-vines, by the streamlet-side,
Close to Baccheion; till the cool increase,
And other stars steal on the evening-star,
And so, we homeward flock i' the dusk, we five!

You will expect, no one of all the words
O' the play but is grown part now of my soul,
Since the adventure. 'T is the poet speaks:
But if I, too, should try and speak at times,
Leading your love to where my love, perchance,
Climbed earlier, found a nest before you knew —
Why, bear with the poor climber, for love's sake!
Look at Baccheion's beauty opposite,
The temple with the pillars at the porch!
See you not something beside masonry?
What if my words wind in and out the stone
As yonder ivy, the God's parasite?
Though they leap all the way the pillar leads,
Festoon about the marble, foot to frieze,
And serpentiningly enrich the roof,
Toy with some few bees and a bird or two, —
What then? The column holds the cornice up.

---

There slept a silent palace in the sun,
With plains adjacent and Thessalian peace —
Pherai, where King Admetos ruled the land.
Out from the portico there gleamed a God,
Apollon: for the bow was in his hand,
The quiver at his shoulder, all his shape
One dreadful beauty. And he hailed the house
As if he knew it well and loved it much:
"O Admeteian domes, where I endured,
Even the God I am, to drudge awhile,
Do righteous penance for a reckless deed,
Accepting the slaves' table thankfully!"
Then told how Zeus had been the cause of all,
Raising the wrath in him which took revenge
And slew those forgers of the thunderbolt
Wherewith Zeus blazed the life from out the breast
Of Phoibos' son Asklepios (I surmise,

Because he brought the dead to life again)
And so, for punishment, must needs go slave,
God as he was, with a mere mortal lord:
— Told how he came to King Admetos' land,
And played the ministrant, was herdsman there,
Warding all harm away from him and his
Till now; "For, holy as I am," said he,
"The lord I chanced upon was holy too:
Whence I deceived the Moirai, drew from death
My master, this same son of Pheres, — ay,
The Goddesses conceded him escape
From Hades, when the fated day should fall,
Could he exchange lives, find some friendly one
Ready, for his sake, to content the grave.
But trying all in turn, the friendly list,
Why, he found no one, none who loved so much,
Nor father, nor the aged mother's self
That bore him, no, not any save his wife,
Willing to die instead of him and watch
Never a sunrise nor a sunset more:
And she is even now within the house,
Upborne by pitying hands, the feeble frame
Gasping its last of life out; since to-day
Destiny is accomplished, and she dies,
And I, lest here pollution light on me,
Leave, as ye witness, all my wonted joy
In this dear dwelling. Ay, — for here comes Death
Close on us of a sudden! who, pale priest
Of the mute people, means to bear his prey
To the house of Hades. The symmetric step!
How he treads true to time and place and thing,
Dogging day, hour and minute, for death's-due!"

And we observed another Deity,
Half in, half out the portal, — watch and ward, —

Eyeing his fellow: formidably fixed,
Yet faltering too at who affronted him,
As somehow disadvantaged, should they strive.
Like some dread heapy blackness, ruffled wing,
Convulsed and cowering head that is all eye,
Which proves a ruined eagle who, too blind
Swooping in quest o' the quarry, fawn or kid,
Descried deep down the chasm 'twixt rock and rock,
Has wedged and mortised, into either wall
O' the mountain, the pent earthquake of his power;
So lies, half hurtless yet still terrible,
Just when — who stalks up, who stands front to front,
But the great lion-guarder of the gorge,
Lord of the ground, a stationed glory there?
Yet he too pauses ere he try the worst
O' the frightful unfamiliar nature, new
To the chasm, indeed, but elsewhere known enough,
Among the shadows and the silences
Above i' the sky: so each antagonist
Silently faced his fellow and forbore.
Till Death shrilled, hard and quick, in spite and fear:

"Ha ha, and what mayst thou do at the domes,
Why hauntest here, thou Phoibos? Here again
At the old injustice, limiting our rights,
Balking of honor due us Gods o' the grave?
Was 't not enough for thee to have delayed
Death from Admetos, — with thy crafty art
Cheating the very Fates, — but thou must arm
The bow-hand and take station, press 'twixt me
And Pelias' daughter, who then saved her spouse, —
Did just that, now thou comest to undo, —
Taking his place to die, Alkestis here?"

But the God sighed "Have courage! All my arms,
This time, are simple justice and fair words."

Then each plied each with rapid interchange:
"What need of bow, were justice arms enough?"
"Ever it is my wont to bear the bow."
"Ay, and with bow, not justice, help this house!"
"I help it, since a friend's woe weighs me too."
"And now, — wilt force from me this second corpse?"
"By force I took no corpse at first from thee."
"How then is he above ground, not beneath?"
"He gave his wife instead of him, thy prey."
"And prey, this time at least, I bear below!"
"Go take her! — for I doubt persuading thee . . ."
"To kill the doomed one? What my function else?"
"No! Rather, to despatch the true mature."
"Truly I take thy meaning, see thy drift!"
"Is there a way then she may reach old age?"
"No way! I glad me in my honors too!"
"But, young or old, thou tak'st one life, no more!"
"Younger they die, greater my praise redounds!"
"If she die old, — the sumptous funeral!"
"Thou layest down a law the rich would like."
"How so? Did wit lurk there and 'scape thy sense?"
"Who could buy substitutes would die old men."
"It seems thou wilt not grant me, then, this grace?"

"This grace I will not grant: thou know'st my ways."

"Ways harsh to men, hateful to Gods, at least!"

"All things thou canst not have: my rights for me!"

And then Apollon prophesied, — I think,
More to himself than to impatient Death,
Who did not hear or would not heed the while, —
For he went on to say "Yet even so,
Cruel above the measure, thou shalt clutch
No life here! Such a man do I perceive
Advancing to the house of Pheres now,
Sent by Eurustheus to bring out of Thrace,
The winter world, a chariot with its steeds!
He indeed, when Admetos proves the host,
And he the guest, at the house here, — he it is
Shall bring to bear such force, and from thy hands
Rescue this woman. Grace no whit to me
Will that prove, since thou dost thy deed the same,
And earnest too my hate, and all for naught!"
But how should Death or stay or understand?
Doubtless, he only felt the hour was come,
And the sword free; for he but flung some taunt —
"Having talked much, thou wilt not gain the more!
This woman, then, descends to Hades' hall
Now that I rush on her, begin the rites
O' the sword; for sacred, to us Gods below,
That head whose hair this sword shall sanctify!"

And, in the fire-flash of the appalling sword,
The uprush and the outburst, the onslaught
Of Death's portentous passage through the door,
Apollon stood a pitying moment-space:
I caught one last gold gaze upon the night
Nearing the world now: and the God was gone,

And mortals left to deal with misery,
As in came stealing slow, now this, now that
Old sojourner throughout the country-side,
Servants grown friends to those unhappy here:
And, cloudlike in their increase, all these griefs
Broke and began the over-brimming wail,
Out of a common impulse, word by word.

"What now may mean the silence at the door?
Why is Admetos' mansion stricken dumb?
Not one friend near, to say if we should mourn
Our mistress dead, or if Alkestis lives
And sees the light still, Pelias' child — to me,
To all, conspicuously the best of wives
That ever was toward husband in this world!
Hears any one or wail beneath the roof,
Or hands that strike each other, or the groan
Announcing all is done and naught to dread?
Still not a servant stationed at the gates!
O Paian, that thou wouldst dispart the wave
O' the woe, be present! Yet, had woe o'erwhelmed
The housemates, they were hardly silent thus:
It cannot be, the dead is forth and gone.
Whence comes thy gleam of hope? I dare not hope:
What is the circumstance that heartens thee?
How could Admetos have dismissed a wife
So worthy, unescorted to the grave?
Before the gates I see no hallowed vase
Of fountain-water, such as suits death's door;
Nor any clipt locks strew the vestibule,
Though surely these drop when we grieve the dead,
Nor hand sounds smitten against youthful hand,
The women's way. And yet — the appointed time —
How speak the word? — this day is even the day
Ordained her for departing from its light.

O touch calamitous to heart and soul!
Needs must one, when the good are tortured so,
Sorrow, — one reckoned faithful from the first."

Then their souls rose together, and one sigh
Went up in cadence from the common mouth:
How "Vainly — any whither in the world
Directing or land-labor or sea-search —
To Lukia or the sand-waste, Ammon's seat —
Might you set free their hapless lady's soul
From the abrupt Fate's footstep instant now.
Not a sheep-sacrificer at the hearths
Of Gods had they to go to: one there was
Who, if his eyes saw light still, — Phoibos' son, —
Had wrought so she might leave the shadowy place
And Hades' portal; for he propped up Death's
Subdued ones till the Zeus-flung thunder-flame
Struck him; and now what hope of life were hailed
With open arms? For, all the king could do
Is done already, — not one God whereof
The altar fails to reek with sacrifice:
And for assuagement of these evils — naught!"

But here they broke off, for a matron moved
Forth from the house: and, as her tears flowed fast,
They gathered round. "What fortune shall we hear?
For mourning thus, if aught affect thy lord,
We pardon thee: but lives the lady yet
Or has she perished? — that we fain would know!"

"Call her dead call her living, each style serves,"
The matron said: "though grave-ward bowed, she breathed;
Nor knew her husband what the misery meant
Before he felt it: hope of life was none:

The appointed day pressed hard; the funeral pomp
He had prepared too."
When the friends broke out:
"Let her in dying know herself at least
Sole wife, of all the wives 'neath the sun wide,
For glory and for goodness!" — "Ah, how else
Than best? who controverts the claim?" quoth she:
"What kind of creature should the woman prove
That has surpassed Alkestis? — surelier shown
Preference for her husband to herself
Than by determining to die for him?
But so much all our city knows indeed:
Hear what she did indoors and wonder then!
For, when she felt the crowning day was come,
She washed with river-waters her white skin,
And, taking from the cedar closets forth
Vesture and ornament, bedecked herself
Nobly, and stood before the hearth, and prayed:
'Mistress, because I now depart the world,
Falling before thee the last time, I ask —
Be mother to my orphans! wed the one
To a kind wife, and make the other's mate
Some princely person: nor, as I who bore
My children perish, suffer that they too
Die all untimely, but live, happy pair,
Their full glad life out in the fatherland!'
And every altar through Admetos' house
She visited and crowned and prayed before,
Stripping the myrtle-foliage from the boughs,
Without a tear, without a groan, — no change
At all to that skin's nature, fair to see,
Caused by the imminent evil. But this done —
Reaching her chamber, falling on her bed,
There, truly, burst she into tears and spoke:
'O bride-bed, where I loosened from my life

Virginity for that same husband's sake
Because of whom I die now — fare thee well!
Since nowise do I hate thee: me alone
Hast thou destroyed; for, shrinking to betray
Thee and my spouse, I die: but thee, O bed,
Some other woman shall possess as wife —
Truer, no! but of better fortune, say!'
— So falls on, kisses it till all the couch
Is moistened with the eyes' sad overflow.
But, when of many tears she had her fill,
She flings from off the couch, goes headlong forth,
Yet, — forth the chamber, — still keeps turning back
And casts her on the couch again once more.
Her children, clinging to their mother's robe,
Wept meanwhile: but she took them in her arms,
And, as a dying woman might, embraced
Now one and now the other; 'neath the roof,
All of the household servants wept as well,
Moved to compassion for their mistress; she
Extended her right hand to all and each,
And there was no one of such low degree
She spoke not to nor had an answer from.
Such are the evils in Admetos' house.
Dying, — why, he had died; but, living, gains
Such grief as this he never will forget!"

And when they questioned of Admetos, "Well —
Holding his dear wife in his hands, he weeps;
Entreats her not to give him up, and seeks
The impossible, in fine: for there she wastes
And withers by disease, abandoned now,
A mere dead weight upon her husband's arm.
Yet, none the less, although she breathe so faint,
Her will is to behold the beams o' the sun:
Since never more again, but this last once,

Shall she see sun, its circlet or its ray.
But I will go, announce your presence, — friends
Indeed; since 't is not all so love their lords
As seek them in misfortune, kind the same:
But you are the old friends I recognize."

And at the word she turned again to go
The while they waited, taking up the plaint
To Zeus again: "What passage from this strait?
What loosing of the heavy fortune fast
About the palace? Will such help appear,
Or must we clip the locks and cast around
Each form already the black peplos' fold?
Clearly the black robe, clearly! All the same,
Pray to the Gods! — like Gods' no power so great!
O thou king Paian, find some way to save!
Reveal it, yea, reveal it! Since of old
Thou found'st a cure, why, now again become
Releaser from the bonds of Death, we beg,
And give the sanguinary Hades pause!"
So the song dwindled into a mere moan,
How dear the wife, and what her husband's woe;
When suddenly —
"Behold, behold!" breaks forth:
"Here is she coming from the house indeed!
Her husband comes, too! Cry aloud, lament,
Pheraian land, this best of women, bound —
So is she withered by disease away —
For realms below and their infernal king!
Never will we affirm there 's more of joy
Than grief in marriage; making estimate
Both from old sorrows anciently observed,
And this misfortune of the king we see —
Admetos who, of bravest spouse bereaved,
Will live life's remnant out, no life at all!"

So wailed they, while a sad procession wound
Slow from the innermost o' the palace, stopped
At the extreme verge of the platform-front:
There opened, and disclosed Alkestis' self,
The consecrated lady, borne to look
Her last — and let the living look their last —
She at the sun, we at Alkestis.
We!
For would you note a memorable thing?
We grew to see in that severe regard, —
Hear in that hard dry pressure to the point,
Word slow pursuing word in monotone, —
What Death meant when he called her consecrate
Henceforth to Hades. I believe, the sword —
Its office was to cut the soul at once
From life, — from something in this world which hides
Truth, and hides falsehood, and so lets us live
Somehow. Suppose a rider furls a cloak
About a horse's head; unfrightened, so,
Between the menace of a flame, between
Solicitation of the pasturage,
Untempted equally, he goes his gait
To journey's end: then pluck the pharos off!
Show what delusions steadied him i' the straight
O' the path, made grass seem fire and fire seem grass,
All through a little bandage o'er the eyes!
As certainly with eyes unbandaged now
Alkestis looked upon the action here,
Self-immolation for Admetos' sake;
Saw, with a new sense, all her death would do,
And which of her survivors had the right,
And which the less right, to survive thereby.
For, you shall note, she uttered no one word

Of love more to her husband, though he wept
Plenteously, waxed importunate in prayer —
Folly's old fashion when its seed bears fruit.
I think she judged that she had bought the ware
O' the seller at its value, — nor praised him
Nor blamed herself, but, with indifferent eye,
Saw him purse money up, prepare to leave
The buyer with a solitary bale —
True purple — but in place of all that coin,
Had made a hundred others happy too,
If so willed fate or fortune! What remained
To give away, should rather go to these
Than one with coin to clink and contemplate.
Admetos had his share and might depart,
The rest was for her children and herself.
(Charopé makes a face: but wait awhile!)
She saw things plain as Gods do: by one stroke
O' the sword that rends the life-long veil away.
(Also Euripides saw plain enough:
But you and I, Charopé — ! you and I
Will trust his sight until our own grow clear.)

"Sun, and thou light of day, and heavenly dance
O' the fleet cloud-figure!" (so her passion paused,
While the awe-stricken husband made his moan,
Muttered now this now that ineptitude:
"Sun that sees thee and me, a suffering pair,
Who did the Gods no wrong whence thou shouldst
die!")
Then, as if caught up, carried in their course,
Fleeting and free as cloud and sunbeam are,
She missed no happiness that lay beneath:
"O thou wide earth, from these my palace roofs,
To distant nuptial chambers once my own
In that Iolkos of my ancestry!" —

There the flight failed her. "Raise thee, wretched
one!
Give us not up! Pray pity from the Gods!"

Vainly Admetos: for "I see it — see
The two-oared boat! The ferryer of the dead,
Charon, hand hard upon the boatman's-pole,
Calls me — even now calls — 'Why delayest thou?
Quick! Thou obstructest all made ready here
For prompt departure: quick, then!' "
"Woe is me!
A bitter voyage this to undergo,
Even i' the telling! Adverse Powers above,
How do ye plague us!"
Then a shiver ran:
"He has me — seest not? — hales me, — who is it? —
To the hall o' the Dead — ah, who but Hades' self,
He, with the wings there, glares at me, one gaze
All that blue brilliance, under the eyebrow!
What wilt thou do? Unhand me! Such a way
I have to traverse, all unhappy one!"

"Way — piteous to thy friends, but, most of all,
Me and thy children: ours assuredly
A common partnership in grief like this!"

Whereat they closed about her; but "Let be!
Leave, let me lie now! Strength forsakes my feet.
Hades is here, and shadowy on my eyes
Comes the night creeping. Children — children,
now
Indeed, a mother is no more for you!
Farewell, O children, long enjoy the light!"

"Ah me, the melancholy word I hear,
Oppressive beyond every kind of death!

No, by the Deities, take heart nor dare
To give me up — no, by our children too
Made orphans of! But rise, be resolute,
Since, thou departed, I no more remain!
For in thee are we bound up, to exist
Or cease to be — so we adore thy love!"

— Which brought out truth to judgment. At this word
And protestation, all the truth in her
Claimed to assert itself: she waved away
The blue-eyed black-wing'd phantom, held in check
The advancing pageantry of Hades there,
And, with no change in her own countenance,
She fixed her eyes on the protesting man,
And let her lips unlock their sentence, — so!
"Admetos, — how things go with me thou seest, —
I wish to tell thee, ere I die, what things
I will should follow. I — to honor thee,
Secure for thee, by my own soul's exchange,
Continued looking on the daylight here —
Die for thee — yet, if so I pleased, might live,
Nay, wed what man of Thessaly I would,
And dwell i' the dome with pomp and queenliness.
I would not, — would not live bereft of thee,
With children orphaned, neither shrank at all,
Though having gifts of youth wherein I joyed.
Yet, who begot thee and who gave thee birth,
Both of these gave thee up; no less, a term
Of life was reached when death became them well,
Ay, well — to save their child and glorious die:
Since thou wast all they had, nor hope remained
Of having other children in thy place.
So, I and thou had lived out our full time,

Nor thou, left lonely of thy wife, wouldst groan
With children reared in orphanage: but thus
Some God disposed things, willed they so should be.
Be they so! Now do thou remember this,
Do me in turn a favor — favor, since
Certainly I shall never claim my due,
For nothing is more precious than a life:
But a fit favor, as thyself wilt say,
Loving our children here no less than I,
If head and heart be sound in thee at least.
Uphold them, make them masters of my house,
Nor wed and give a step-dame to the pair,
Who, being a worse wife than I, thro' spite
Will raise her hand against both thine and mine.
Never do this at least, I pray to thee!
For hostile the new-comer, the step-dame,
To the old brood — a very viper she
For gentleness! Here stand they, boy and girl;
The boy has got a father, a defence
Tower-like, he speaks to and has answer from:
But thou, my girl, how will thy virginhood
Conclude itself in marriage fittingly?
Upon what sort of sire-found yoke-fellow
Art thou to chance? with all to apprehend —
Lest, casting on thee some unkind report,
She blast thy nuptials in the bloom of youth.
For neither shall thy mother watch thee wed,
Nor hearten thee in childbirth, standing by
Just when a mother's presence helps the most!
No, for I have to die: and this my ill
Comes to me, nor to-morrow, no, nor yet
The third day of the month, but now, even now,
I shall be reckoned among those no more.
Farewell, be happy! And to thee, indeed,
Husband, the boast remains permissible

Thou hadst a wife was worthy! and to you,
Children; as good a mother gave you birth."

"Have courage!" interposed the friends, "For him
I have no scruple to declare — all this
Will he perform, except he fail of sense."

"All this shall be — shall be!" Admetos sobbed:
"Fear not! And, since I had thee living, dead
Alone wilt thou be called my wife: no fear
That some Thessalian ever styles herself
Bride, hails this man for husband in thy place!
No woman, be she of such lofty line
Or such surpassing beauty otherwise!
Enough of children: gain from these I have,
Such only may the Gods grant! since in thee
Absolute is our loss, where all was gain.
And I shall bear for thee no year-long grief,
But grief that lasts while my own days last, love!
Love! For my hate is she who bore me, now:
And him I hate, my father: loving-ones
Truly, in word not deed! But thou didst pay
All dearest to thee down, and buy my life,
Saving me so! Is there not cause enough
That I who part with such companionship
In thee, should make my moan? I moan, and more:
For I will end the feastings — social flow
O' the wine friends flock for, garlands and the Muse
That graced my dwelling. Never now for me
To touch the lyre, to lift my soul in song
At summons of the Lydian flute; since thou
From out my life hast emptied all the joy!
And this thy body, in thy likeness wrought
By some wise hand of the artificers,
Shall lie disposed within my marriage-bed:

This I will fall on, this enfold about,
Call by thy name, — my dear wife in my arms
Even though I have not, I shall seem to have —
A cold delight, indeed, but all the same
So should I lighten of its weight my soul!
And, wandering my way in dreams perchance,
Thyself wilt bless me: for, come when they will,
Even by night our loves are sweet to see.
But were the tongue and tune of Orpheus mine,
So that to Koré crying, or her lord,
In hymns, from Hades I might rescue thee —
Down would I go, and neither Plouton's dog
Nor Charon, he whose oar sends souls across,
Should stay me till again I made thee stand
Living, within the light! But, failing this,
There, where thou art, await me when I die,
Make ready our abode, my house-mate still!
For in the self-same cedar, me with thee
Will I provide that these our friends shall place,
My side lay close by thy side! Never, corpse
Although I be, would I division bear
From thee, my faithful one of all the world!"

So he stood sobbing: nowise insincere,
But somehow child-like, like his children, like
Childishness the world over. What was new
In this announcement that his wife must die?
What particle of pain beyond the pact
He made, with eyes wide open, long ago —
Made and was, if not glad, content to make?
Now that the sorrow, he had called for, came,
He sorrowed to the height: none heard him say,
However, what would seem so pertinent,
"To keep this pact, I find surpass my power:
Rescind it, Moirai! Give me back her life,

And take the life I kept by base exchange!
Or, failing that, here stands your laughing-stock
Fooled by you, worthy just the fate o' the fool
Who makes a pother to escape the best
And gain the worst you wiser Powers allot!"
No, not one word of this: nor did his wife
Despite the sobbing, and the silence soon
To follow, judge so much was in his thought —
Fancy that, should the Moirai acquiesce,
He would relinquish life nor let her die.
The man was like some merchant who, in storm,
Throws the freight over to redeem the ship:
No question, saving both were better still.
As it was, — why, he sorrowed, which sufficed.
So, all she seemed to notice in his speech
Was what concerned her children. Children, too,
Bear the grief and accept the sacrifice.
Rightly rules nature: does the blossomed bough
O' the grape-vine, or the dry grape's self, bleed wine?

So, bending to her children all her love,
She fastened on their father's only word
To purpose now, and followed it with this.
"O children, now yourselves have heard these things —
Your father saying he will never wed
Another woman to be over you,
Nor yet dishonor me!"

"And now at least
I say it, and I will accomplish too!"

"Then, for such promise of accomplishment,
Take from my hand these children!"

"Thus I take —
Dear gift from the dear hand!"
"Do thou become
Mother, now, to these children in my place!"
"Great the necessity I should be so,
At least, to these bereaved of thee!"
"Child — child!
Just when I needed most to live, below
Am I departing from you both!"
"Ah me!
And what shall I do, then, left lonely thus?"
"Time will appease thee: who is dead is naught."
"Take me with thee — take, by the Gods below!"
"We are sufficient, we who die for thee."
"Oh, Powers, ye widow me of what a wife!"
"And truly the dimmed eye draws earthward now!"
"Wife, if thou leav'st me, I am lost indeed!"
"She once was — now is nothing, thou mayst say."
"Raise thy face nor forsake thy children thus!"
"Ah, willingly indeed I leave them not!
But — fare ye well, my children!'
"Look on them —
Look!"
"I am nothingness."
"What dost thou? Leav'st . . ."

"Farewell!"
And in the breath she passed away.
"Undone — me miserable!" moaned the king,
While friends released the long-suspended sigh,
"Gone is she: no wife for Admetos more!"

Such was the signal: how the woe broke forth,
Why tell? — or how the children's tears ran fast
Bidding their father note the eyelids' stare,
Hands' droop, each dreadful circumstance of death.

"Ay, she hears not, she sees not: I and you,
'T is plain, are stricken hard and have to bear!"
Was all Admetos answered; for, I judge,
He only now began to taste the truth:
The thing done lay revealed, which undone thing,
Rehearsed for fact by fancy, at the best,
Never can equal. He had used himself
This long while (as he muttered presently)
To practise with the terms, the blow involved
By the bargain, sharp to bear, but bearable
Because of plain advantage at the end.
Now that, in fact not fancy, the blow fell —
Needs must he busy him with the surprise.
"Alkestis — not to see her nor be seen,
Hear nor be heard of by her, any more
To-day, to-morrow, to the end of time —
Did I mean this should buy my life?" thought he.

So, friends came round him, took him by the hand,
Bade him remember our mortality,
Its due, its doom: how neither was he first,
Nor would be last, to thus deplore the loved.

"I understand," slow the words came at last.
"Nor of a sudden did the evil here

Fly on me: I have known it long ago,
Ay, and essayed myself in misery;
Nothing is new. You have to stay, you friends,
Because the next need is to carry forth
The corpse here: you must stay and do your part,
Chant proper pæan to the God below;
Drink-sacrifice he likes not. I decree
That all Thessalians over whom I rule
Hold grief in common with me; let them shear
Their locks, and be the peplos black they show!
And you who to the chariot yoke your steeds,
Or manage steeds one-frontleted, — I charge,
Clip from each neck with steel the mane away!
And through my city, nor of flute nor lyre
Be there a sound till twelve full moons succeed.
For I shall never bury any corpse
Dearer than this to me, nor better friend:
One worthy of all honor from me, since
Me she has died for, she and she alone."

With that, he sought the inmost of the house,
He and his dead, to get grave's garniture,
While the friends sang the pæan that should peal.
"Daughter of Pelias with farewell from me,
I' the house of Hades have thy unsunned home!
Let Hades know, the dark-haired deity, —
And he who sits to row and steer alike,
Old corpse-conductor, let him know he bears
Over the Acherontian lake, this time,
I' the two-oared boat, the best — oh, best by far
Of womankind! For thee, Alkestis Queen!
Many a time those haunters of the Muse
Shall sing thee to the seven-stringed mountain-shell,
And glorify in hymns that need no harp,
At Sparta when the cycle comes about,

And that Karneian month wherein the moon
Rises and never sets the whole night through:
So too at splendid and magnificent
Athenai. Such the spread of thy renown,
And such the lay that, dying, thou hast left
Singer and sayer. O that I availed
Of my own might to send thee once again
From Hades' hall, Kokutos' stream, by help
O' the oar that dips the river, back to day!"

So, the song sank to prattle in her praise:
"Light, from above thee, lady, fall the earth,
Thou only one of womankind to die,
Wife for her husband! If Admetos take
Anything to him like a second spouse —
Hate from his offspring and from us shall be
His portion, let the king assure himself!
No mind his mother had to hide in earth
Her body for her son's sake, nor his sire
Had heart to save whom he begot, — not they,
The white-haired wretches! only thou it was,
I' the bloom of youth, didst save him and so die!
Might it be mine to chance on such a mate
And partner! For there 's penury in life
Of such allowance: were she mine at least,
So wonderful a wife, assuredly
She would companion me throughout my days
And never once bring sorrow!"
A great voice —
"My hosts here!"
Oh, the thrill that ran through us!
Never was aught so good and opportune
As that great interrupting voice! For see!
Here maundered this dispirited old age
Before the palace; whence a something crept

Which told us well enough without a word
What was a-doing inside, — every touch
O' the garland on those temples, tenderest
Disposure of each arm along its side,
Came putting out what warmth i' the world was left.
Then, as it happens at a sacrifice
When, drop by drop, some lustral bath is brimmed:
Into the thin and clear and cold, at once
They slaughter a whole wine-skin: Bacchos' blood
Sets the white water all a-flame; even so,
Sudden into the midst of sorrow, leapt
Along with the gay cheer of that great voice,
Hope, joy, salvation: Herakles was here!
Himself, o' the threshold, sent his voice on first
To herald all that human and divine
I' the weary happy face of him, — half God,
Half man, which made the god-part God the more.

"Hosts mine," he broke upon the sorrow with,
"Inhabitants of this Pheraian soil,
Chance I upon Admetos inside here?"

The irresistible sound wholesome heart
O' the hero, — more than all the mightiness
At labor in the limbs that, for man's sake,
Labored and meant to labor their life long, —
This drove back, dried up sorrow at its source.
How could it brave the happy weary laugh
Of who had bantered sorrow "Sorrow here?
What have you done to keep your friend from harm?
Could no one give the life I see he keeps?
Or, say there 's sorrow here past friendly help,
Why waste a word or let a tear escape
While other sorrows wait you in the world,
And want the life of you, though helpless here?"

Clearly there was no telling such an one
How, when their monarch tried who loved him more
Than he loved them, and found they loved, as he,
Each man, himself, and held, no otherwise,
That, of all evils in the world, the worst
Was — being forced to die, whate'er death gain:
How all this selfishness in him and them
Caused certain sorrow which they sang about, —
I think that Herakles, who held his life
Out on his hand, for any man to take —
I think his laugh had marred their threnody.

"He is in the house," they answered. After all,
They might have told the story, talked their best
About the inevitable sorrow here,
Nor changed nor checked the kindly nature, — no!
So long as men were merely weak, not bad,
He loved men: were they Gods he used to help?
"Yea, Pheres' son is in-doors, Herakles.
But say, what sends thee to Thessalian soil,
Brought by what business to this Pherai town?"

"A certain labor that I have to do
Eurustheus the Tirunthian," laughed the God.

"And whither wendest — on what wandering
Bound now?" (they had an instinct guessed what meant
Wanderings, labors, in the God's light mouth.)

"After the Thrakian Diomedes' car
With the four horses."

"Ah, but canst thou that?
Art inexperienced in thy host to be?"

"All-inexperienced: I have never gone
As yet to the land o' the Bistones."

"Then, look
By no means to be master of the steeds
Without a battle!"
"Battle there may be:
I must refuse no labor, all the same."

"Certainly, either having slain a foe
Wilt thou return to us, or, slain thyself,
Stay there!"
"And, even if the game be so,
The risk in it were not the first I run."

"But, say thou overpower the lord o' the place,
What more advantage dost expect thereby?"

"I shall drive off his horses to the king."

"No easy handling them to bit the jaw!"

"Easy enough; except, at least, they breathe
Fire from their nostrils!"
"But they mince up men
With those quick jaws!"
"You talk of provender
For mountain-beasts, and not mere horses' food!"

"Thou mayst behold their mangers caked with gore!"

"And of what sire does he who bred them boast
Himself the son?"
"Of Ares, king o' the targe —
Thrakian, of gold throughout."
Another laugh.
"Why, just the labor, just the lot for me
Dost thou describe in what I recognize!
Since hard and harder, high and higher yet,
Truly this lot of mine is like to go
If I must needs join battle with the brood

Of Ares: ay, I fought Lukaon first,
And again, Kuknos: now engage in strife
This third time, with such horses and such lord.
But there is nobody shall ever see
Alkmené's son shrink foemen's hand before!"

— "Or ever hear him say" (the Chorus thought)
"That death is terrible; and help us so
To chime in — 'terrible beyond a doubt,
And, if to thee, why, to ourselves much more:
Know what has happened, then, and sympathize'!"
Therefore they gladly stopped the dialogue,
Shifted the burthen to new shoulder straight,
As, "Look where comes the lord o' the land, himself,
Admetos, from the palace!" they outbroke
In some surprise, as well as much relief.
What had induced the king to waive his right
And luxury of woe in loneliness?

Out he came quietly; the hair was clipt,
And the garb sable; else no outward sign
Of sorrow as he came and faced his friend.
Was truth fast terrifying tears away?
"Hail, child of Zeus, and sprung from Perseus too!"
The salutation ran without a fault.

"And thou, Admetos, King of Thessaly!"

"Would, as thou wishest me, the grace might fall!
But my good-wisher, that thou art, I know."

"What 's here? these shorn locks, this sad show of thee?"

"I must inter a certain corpse to-day."

"Now, from thy children God avert mischance!"

"They live, my children; all are in the house!"

"Thy father — if 't is he departs indeed,
His age was ripe at least."

"My father lives,
And she who bore me lives too, Herakles."

"It cannot be thy wife Alkestis gone?"

"Two-fold the tale is, I can tell of her."

"Dead dost thou speak of her, or living yet?"

"She is — and is not: hence the pain to me!"

"I learn no whit the more, so dark thy speech!"

"Know'st thou not on what fate she needs must fall?"

"I know she is resigned to die for thee." 1161

"How lives she still, then, if submitting so?"

"Eh, weep her not beforehand! wait till then!"

"Who is to die is dead; doing is done."

"To be and not to be are thought diverse."

"Thou judgest this — I, that way, Herakles!"

"Well, but declare what causes thy complaint!
Who is the man has died from out thy friends?"

"No man: I had a woman in my mind."

"Alien, or some one born akin to thee?" 1170

"Alien: but still related to my house."

"How did it happen then that here she died?"

"Her father dying left his orphan here."

"Alas, Admetos — would we found thee gay,
Not grieving!"

"What as if about to do
Subjoinest thou that comment?"

"I shall seek
Another hearth, proceed to other hosts."

"Never, O king, shall that be! No such ill
Betide me!"

"Nay, to mourners should there come
A guest, he proves importunate!"

"The dead —
Dead are they: but go thou within my house!"

"'T is base carousing beside friends who mourn."

"The guest-rooms, whither we shall lead thee, lie
Apart from ours."

"Nay, let me go my way!
Ten thousandfold the favor I shall thank!"

"It may not be thou goest to the hearth
Of any man but me!" so made an end
Admetos, softly and decisively,
Of the altercation. Herakles forbore:
And the king bade a servant lead the way,
Open the guest-rooms ranged remote from view
O' the main hall; tell the functionaries, next,
They had to furnish forth a plenteous feast,
And then shut close the doors o' the hall, midway,
"Because it is not proper friends who feast
Should hear a groaning or be grieved," quoth he.

Whereat the hero, who was truth itself,
Let out the smile again, repressed awhile
Like fountain-brilliance one forbids to play.
He did too many grandnesses, to note
Much in the meaner things about his path:
And stepping there, with face towards the sun,

Stopped seldom to pluck weeds or ask their names.
Therefore he took Admetos at the word:
This trouble must not hinder any more
A true heart from good will and pleasant ways.
And so, the great arm, which had slain the snake,
Strained his friend's head a moment in embrace
On that broad breast beneath the lion's hide,
Till the king's cheek winced at the thick rough gold;
And then strode off, with who had care of him,
To the remote guest-chamber: glad to give
Poor flesh and blood their respite and relief
In the interval 'twixt fight and fight again —
All for the world's sake. Our eyes followed him,
Be sure, till those mid-doors shut us outside.
The king, too, watched great Herakles go off
All faith, love, and obedience to a friend.

And when they questioned him, the simple ones,
"What dost thou? Such calamity to face,
Lies full before thee — and thou art so bold
As play the host, Admetos? Hast thy wits?"
He replied calmly to each chiding tongue:
"But if from house and home I forced away
A coming guest, wouldst thou have praised me more?
No, truly! since calamity were mine,
Nowise diminished; while I showed myself
Unhappy and inhospitable too:
So adding to my ills this other ill,
That mine were styled a stranger-hating house.
Myself have ever found this man the best
Of entertainers when I went his way
To parched and thirsty Argos."
"If so be —
Why didst thou hide what destiny was here,
When one came that was kindly, as thou say'st?"

"He never would have willed to cross my door
Had he known aught of my calamities.
And probably to some of you I seem
Unwise enough in doing what I do;
Such will scarce praise me: but these halls of mine
Know not to drive off and dishonor guests."

And so, the duty done, he turned once more
To go and busy him about his dead.
As for the sympathizers left to muse,
There was a change, a new light thrown on things,
Contagion from the magnanimity
O' the man whose life lay on his hand so light,
As up he stepped, pursuing duty still
"Higher and harder," as he laughed and said.
Somehow they found no folly now in the act
They blamed erewhile: Admetos' private grief
Shrank to a somewhat pettier obstacle
I' the way o' the world: they saw good days had been,
And good days, peradventure, still might be,
Now that they overlooked the present cloud
Heavy upon the palace opposite.
And soon the thought took words and music thus.

"Harbor of many a stranger, free to friend,
Ever and always, O thou house o'-the man
We mourn for! Thee, Apollon's very self,
The lyric Puthian, deigned inhabit once,
Become a shepherd here in thy domains,
And pipe, adown the winding hill-side paths,
Pastoral marriage-poems to thy flocks
At feed: while with them fed in fellowship,
Through joy i' the music, spot-skin lynxes; ay,
And lions too, the bloody company,
Came, leaving Othrus' dell; and round thy lyre,

Phoibos, there danced the speckle-coated fawn,
Pacing on lightsome fetlock past the pines
Tress-topped, the creature's natural boundary,
Into the open everywhere; such heart
Had she within her, beating joyous beats,
At the sweet reassurance of thy song!
Therefore the lot o' the master is, to live
In a home multitudinous with herds,
Along by the fair-flowing Boibian lake,
Limited, that ploughed land and pasture-plain,
Only where stand the sun's steeds, stabled west
I' the cloud, by that mid-air which makes the clime
Of those Molossoi: and he rules as well
O'er the Aigaian, up to Pelion's shore, —
Sea-stretch without a port! Such lord have we:
And here he opens house now, as of old,
Takes to the heart of it a guest again:
Though moist the eyelid of the master, still
Mourning his dear wife's body, dead but now!"

And they admired: nobility of soul
Was self-impelled to reverence, they saw:
The best men ever prove the wisest too:
Something instinctive guides them still aright.
And on each soul this boldness settled now,
That one, who reverenced the Gods so much,
Would prosper yet: (or — I could wish it ran —
Who venerates the Gods, i' the main will still
Practise things honest though obscure to judge).

They ended, for Admetos entered now;
Having disposed all duteously indoors,
He came into the outside world again,
Quiet as ever: but a quietude
Bent on pursuing its descent to truth,
As who must grope until he gain the ground

O' the dungeon doomed to be his dwelling now.
Already high o'er head was piled the dusk,
When something pushed to stay his downward step,
Pluck back despair just reaching its repose.
He would have bidden the kind presence there
Observe that, — since the corpse was coming out,
Cared for in all things that befit the case,
Carried aloft, in decency and state,
To the last burial place and burning pile, —
'T were proper friends addressed, as custom prompts,
Alkestis bound on her last journeying.

"Ay, for we see thy father" they subjoined
"Advancing as the aged foot best may;
His servants, too: each bringing in his hand
Adornments for thy wife, all pomp that 's due
To the downward-dwelling people." And in truth,
By slow procession till they filled the stage,
Came Pheres, and his following, and their gifts.
You see, the worst of the interruption was,
It plucked back, with an over-hasty hand,
Admetos from descending to the truth,
(I told you) — put him on the brink again,
Full i' the noise and glare where late he stood:
With no fate fallen and irrevocable,
But all things subject still to chance and change:
And that chance — life, and that change — happiness.
And with the low strife came the little mind:
He was once more the man might gain so much,
Life too and wife too, would his friends but help!
All he felt now was that there faced him one
Supposed the likeliest, in emergency,
To help: and help, by mere self-sacrifice
So natural, it seemed as if the sire
Must needs lie open still to argument,

Withdraw the rash decision, not to die
But rather live, though death would save his son: —
Argument like the ignominious grasp
O' the drowner whom his fellow grasps as fierce,
Each marvelling that the other needs must hold
Head out of water, though friend choke thereby.

And first the father's salutation fell.
Burthened, he came, in common with his child,
Who lost, none would gainsay, a good chaste spouse:
Yet such things must be borne, though hard to bear.
"So, take this tribute of adornment, deep
In the earth let it descend along with her!
Behoves we treat the body with respect
— Of one who died, at least, to save thy life,
Kept me from being childless, nor allowed
That I, bereft of thee, should peak and pine
In melancholy age! she, for the sex,
All of her sisters, put in evidence,
By daring such a feat, that female life
Might prove more excellent than men suppose.
O thou Alkestis!" out he burst in fine,
"Who, while thou savedst this my son, didst raise
Also myself from sinking, — hail to thee!
Well be it with thee even in the house
Of Hades! I maintain, if mortals must
Marry, this sort of marriage is the sole
Permitted those among them who are wise!"

So his oration ended. Like hates like:
Accordingly Admetos, — full i' the face
Of Pheres, his true father, outward shape
And inward fashion, body matching soul, —
Saw just himself when years should do their work
And reinforce the selfishness inside

Until it pushed the last disguise away:
As when the liquid metal cools i' the mould,
Stands forth a statue: bloodless, hard, cold bronze.
So, in old Pheres, young Admetos showed,
Pushed to completion: and a shudder ran,
And his repugance soon had vent in speech:
Glad to escape outside, nor, pent within,
Find itself there fit food for exercise.

"Neither to this interment called by me
Comest thou, nor thy presence I account
Among the covetable proofs of love.
As for thy tribute of adornment, — no!
Ne'er shall she don it, ne'er in debt to thee
Be buried! What is thine, that keep thou still!
Then it behoved thee to commiserate
When I was perishing: but thou — who stood'st
Foot-free o' the snare, wast acquiescent then
That I, the young, should die, not thou, the old —
Wilt thou lament this corpse thyself hast slain?
Thou wast not, then, true father to this flesh;
Nor she, who makes profession of my birth
And styles herself my mother, neither she
Bore me: but, come of slave's blood, I was cast
Stealthily 'neath the bosom of thy wife!
Thou showedst, put to touch, the thing thou art,
Nor I esteem myself born child of thee!
Otherwise, thine is the pre-eminence
O'er all the world in cowardice of soul:
Who, being the old man thou art, arrived
Where life should end, didst neither will nor dare
Die for thy son, but left the task to her,
The alien woman, whom I well might think
Own, only mother both and father too!
And yet a fair strife had been thine to strive,

— Dying for thy own child; and brief for thee
In any case, the rest of time to live;
While I had lived, and she, our rest of time,
Nor I been left to groan in solitude.
Yet certainly all things which happy man
Ought to experience, thy experience grasped.
Thou wast a ruler through the bloom of youth,
And I was son to thee, recipient due
Of sceptre and demesne, — no need to fear
That dying thou shouldst leave an orphan house
For strangers to despoil. Nor yet wilt thou
Allege that as dishonoring, forsooth,
Thy length of days, I gave thee up to die, —
I, who have held thee in such reverence!
And in exchange for it, such gratitude
Thou, father, — thou award'st me, mother mine!
Go, lose no time, then, in begetting sons
Shall cherish thee in age, and, when thou diest,
Deck up and lay thee out as corpses claim!
For never I, at least, with this my hand
Will bury thee: it is myself am dead
So far as lies in thee. But if I light
Upon another saviour, and still see
The sunbeam, — his, the child I call myself,
His, the old age that claims my cherishing.
How vainly do these aged pray for death,
Abuse the slow drag of senility!
But should death step up, nobody inclines
To die, nor age is now the weight it was!"

You see what all this poor pretentious talk
Tried at, — how weakness strove to hide itself
In bluster against weakness, — the loud word
To hide the little whisper, not so low
Already in that heart beneath those lips!

Ha, could it be, who hated cowardice
Stood confessed craven, and who lauded so
Self-immolating love, himself had pushed
The loved one to the altar in his place?
Friends interposed, would fain stop further play
O' the sharp-edged tongue: they felt love's champion here
Had left an undefended point or two,
The antagonist might profit by; bade "Pause!
Enough the present sorrow! Nor, O son,
Whet thus against thyself thy father's soul!"

Ay, but old Pheres was the stouter stuff!
Admetos, at the flintiest of the heart,
Had so much soft in him as held a fire:
The other was all iron, clashed from flint
Its fire, but shed no spark and showed no bruise.
Did Pheres crave instruction as to facts?
He came, content, the ignoble word, for him,
Should lurk still in the blackness of each breast,
As sleeps the water-serpent half surmised:
Not brought up to the surface at a bound,
By one touch of the idly-probing spear,
Reed-like against unconquerable scale.
He came pacific, rather, as strength should,
Bringing the decent praise, the due regret,
And each banality prescribed of old.
Did he commence "Why let her die for you?"
And rouse the coiled and quiet ugliness
"What is so good to man as man's own life?"
No: but the other did: and, for his pains,
Out, full in face of him, the venom leapt.

"And whom dost thou make bold, son — Ludian slave,
Or Phrugian whether, money made thy ware,

To drive at with revilings? Know'st thou not
I, a Thessalian, from Thessalian sire
Spring and am born legitimately free?
Too arrogant art thou; and, youngster words
Casting against me, having had thy fling,
Thou goest not off as all were ended so!
I gave thee birth indeed and mastership
I' the mansion, brought thee up to boot: there ends
My owing, nor extends to die for thee!
Never did I receive it as a law
Hereditary, no, nor Greek at all,
That sires in place of sons were bound to die.
For, to thy sole and single self wast thou
Born, with whatever fortune, good or bad;
Such things as bear bestowment, those thou hast;
Already ruling widely, broad-lands, too,
Doubt not but I shall leave thee in due time:
For why? My father left me them before.
Well then, where wrong I thee? — of what defraud?
Neither do thou die for this man, myself,
Nor let him die for thee! — is all I beg.
Thou joyest seeing daylight: dost suppose
Thy father joys not too? Undoubtedly,
Long I account the time to pass below,
And brief my span of days; yet sweet the same:
Is it otherwise to thee who, impudent,
Didst fight off this same death, and livest now
Through having sneaked past fate apportioned thee,
And slain thy wife so? Cryest cowardice
On me, I wonder, thou — whom, poor poltroon,
A very woman worsted, daring death
Just for the sake of thee, her handsome spark?
Shrewdly hast thou contrived how not to die
For evermore now: 't is but still persuade
The wife, for the time being, to take thy place!

What, and thy friends who would not do the like,
These dost thou carp at, craven thus thyself?
Crouch and be silent, craven! Comprehend
That, if thou lovest so that life of thine,
Why, everybody loves his own life too:
So, good words, henceforth! If thou speak us ill,
Many and true an ill thing shalt thou hear!"

There you saw leap the hydra at full length!
Only, the old kept glorying the more,
The more the portent thus uncoiled itself,
Whereas the young man shuddered head to foot,
And shrank from kinship with the creature. Why
Such horror, unless what he hated most,
Vaunting itself outside, might fairly claim
Acquaintance with the counterpart at home?
I would the Chorus here had plucked up heart,
Spoken out boldly and explained the man,
If not to men, to Gods. That way, I think,
Sophokles would have led their dance and song.
Here, they said simply "Too much evil spoke
On both sides!" As the young before, so now
They bade the old man leave abusing thus.

"Let him speak, — I have spoken!" said the youth:
And so died out the wrangle by degrees
In wretched bickering. "If thou wince at fact,
Behoved thee not prove faulty to myself!"

"Had I died for thee I had faulted more!"

"All 's one, then, for youth's bloom and age to die?"

"Our duty is to live one life, not two!"

"Go then, and outlive Zeus, for aught I care!"

"What, curse thy parents with no sort of cause?"

"Curse, truly! All thou lovest is long life!"

"And dost thou not, too, all for love of life,
Carry out now, in place of thine, this corpse?"

"Monument, rather, of thy cowardice,
Thou worst one!"

"Not for me she died, I hope!
That, thou wilt hardly say!"

"No, simply this:
Would, some day, thou mayst come to need myself!"

"Meanwhile, woo many wives — the more will die!"

"And so shame thee who never dared the like!"

"Dear is this light o' the sun-god — dear, I say!"

"Proper conclusion for a beast to draw!"

"One thing is certain: there 's no laughing now,
As out thou bearest the poor dead old man!"

"Die when thou wilt, thou wilt die infamous!"

"And once dead, whether famed or infamous,
I shall not care!"

"Alas and yet again!
How full is age of impudency!"

"True!
Thou couldst not call thy young wife impudent:
She was found foolish merely."

"Get thee gone!
And let me bury this my dead!"

"I go.
Thou buriest her whom thou didst murder first;
Whereof there 's some account to render yet

Those kinsfolk by the marriage-side! I think,
Brother Akastos may be classed with me,
Among the beasts, not men, if he omit
Avenging upon thee his sister's blood!"

"Go to perdition, with thy housemate too!
Grow old all childlessly, with child alive,
Just as ye merit! for to me, at least,
Beneath the same roof ne'er do ye return.
And did I need by heralds' help renounce
The ancestral hearth, I had renounced the same!
But we — since this woe, lying at our feet
I' the path, is to be borne — let us proceed
And lay the body on the pyre."

I think,
What, thro' this wretched wrangle, kept the man
From seeing clear — beside the cause I gave —
Was, that the woe, himself described as full
I' the path before him, there did really lie —
Not roll into the abyss of dead and gone.
How, with Alkestis present, calmly crowned,
Was she so irrecoverable yet —
The bird, escaped, that 's just on bough above,
The flower, let flutter half-way down the brink?
Not so detached seemed lifelessness from life
But — one dear stretch beyond all straining yet —
And he might have her at his heart once more,
When, in the critical minute, up there comes
The father and the fact, to trifle time!

"To the pyre!" an instinct prompted: pallid face,
And passive arm and pointed foot, when these
No longer shall absorb the sight, O friends,
Admetos will begin to see indeed
Who the true foe was, where the blows should fall!

So, the old selfish Pheres went his way,
Case-hardened as he came; and left the youth,
(Only half-selfish now, since sensitive)
To go on learning by a light the more,
As friends moved off, renewing dirge the while:

"Unhappy in thy daring! Noble dame,
Best of the good, farewell! With favoring face
May Hermes the infernal, Hades too,
Receive thee! And if there, — ay, there, — some touch
Of further dignity await the good,
Sharing with them, mayst thou sit throned by her
The Bride of Hades, in companionship!"

Wherewith, the sad procession wound away,
Made slowly for the suburb sepulchre.
And lo, — while still one's heart, in time and tune,
Paced after that symmetric step of Death
Mute-marching, to the mind's eye, at the head
O' the mourners — one hand pointing out their path
With the long pale terrific sword we saw,
The other leading, with grim tender grace,
Alkestis quieted and consecrate, —
Lo, life again knocked laughing at the door!
The world goes on, goes ever, in and through,
And out again o' the cloud. We faced about,
Fronted the palace where the mid-hall-gate
Opened — not half, nor half of half, perhaps —
Yet wide enough to let out light and life,
And warmth and bounty and hope and joy, at once.
Festivity burst wide, fruit rare and ripe
Crushed in the mouth of Bacchos, pulpy-prime,
All juice and flavor, save one single seed
Duly ejected from the God's nice lip,

Which lay o' the red edge, blackly visible —
To wit, a certain ancient servitor:
On whom the festal jaws o' the palace shut,
So, there he stood, a much-bewildered man.
Stupid? Nay, but sagacious in a sort:
Learned, life long, i' the first outside of things,
Though bat for blindness to what lies beneath
And needs a nail-scratch ere 't is laid you bare.
This functionary was the trusted one
We saw deputed by Admetos late
To lead in Herakles and help him, soul
And body, to such snatched repose, snapped-up
Sustainment, as might do away the dust
O' the last encounter, knit each nerve anew
For that next onset sure to come at cry
O' the creature next assailed, — nay, should it prove
Only the creature that came forward now
To play the critic upon Herakles!

"Many the guests" — so he soliloquized
In musings burdensome to breast before,
When it seemed not too prudent tongue should wag —
"Many, and from all quarters of this world,
The guests I now have known frequent our house,
For whom I spread the banquet; but than this,
Never a worse one did I yet receive
At the hearth here! One who seeing, first of all,
The master's sorrow, entered gate the same,
And had the hardihood to house himself.
Did things stop there! But, modest by no means,
He took what entertainment lay to hand,
Knowing of our misfortune, — did we fail
In aught of the fit service, urged us serve
Just as a guest expects! And in his hands
Taking the ivied goblet, drinks and drinks

The unmixed product of black mother-earth,
Until the blaze o' the wine went round about
And warmed him: then he crowns with myrtle sprigs
His head, and howls discordance — twofold lay
Was thereupon for us to listen to —
This fellow singing, namely, nor restrained
A jot by sympathy with sorrows here —
While we o' the household mourned our mistress —
mourned,
That is to say, in silence — never showed
The eyes, which we kept wetting, to the guest —
For there Admetos was imperative.
And so, here am I helping make at home
A guest, some fellow ripe for wickedness,
Robber or pirate, while she goes her way
Out of our house: and neither was it mine
To follow in procession, nor stretch forth
Hand, wave my lady dear a last farewell,
Lamenting who to me and all of us
Domestics was a mother: myriad harms
She used to ward away from every one,
And mollify her husband's ireful mood.
I ask then, do I justly hate or no
This guest, this interloper on our grief?"

"Hate him and justly!" Here 's the proper judge
Of what is due to the house from Herakles!
This man of much experience saw the first
O' the feeble duckings-down at destiny,
When King Admetos went his rounds, poor soul,
A-begging somebody to be so brave
As die for one afraid to die himself —
"Thou, friend? Thou, love? Father or mother, then!
None of you? What, Alkestis must Death catch?
O best of wives, one woman in the world!

But nowise droop: our prayers may still assist:
Let us try sacrifice; if those avail
Nothing and Gods avert their countenance,
Why, deep and durable our grief will be!"
Whereat the house, this worthy at its head,
Re-echoed "deep and durable our grief!"
This sage, who justly hated Herakles,
Did he suggest once "Rather I than she!"
Admonish the Turannos — "Be a man!
Bear thine own burden, never think to thrust
Thy fate upon another and thy wife!
It were a dubious gain could death be doomed
That other, and no passionatest plea
Of thine, to die instead, have force with fate;
Seeing thou lov'st Alkestis: what were life
Unlighted by the loved one? But to live —
Not merely live unsolaced by some thought,
Some word so poor — yet solace all the same —
As 'Thou i' the sepulchre, Alkestis, say!
Would I, or would not I, to save thy life,
Die, and die on, and die for evermore?'
No! but to read red-written up and down
The world 'This is the sunshine, this the shade,
This is some pleasure of earth, sky or sea,
Due to that other, dead that thou mayst live!'
Such were a covetable gain to thee?
Go die, fool, and be happy while 't is time!"
One word of counsel in this kind, methinks,
Had fallen to better purpose than Ai, ai,
Pheu, pheu, e, papai, and a pother of praise
O' the best, best, best one! Nothing was to hate
In King Admetos, Pheres, and the rest
O' the household down to his heroic self!
This was the one thing hateful: Herakles
Had flung into the presence, frank and free,

Out from the labor into the repose,
Ere out again and over head and ears
I' the heart of labor, all for love of men:
Making the most o' the minute, that the soul
And body, strained to height a minute since,
Might lie relaxed in joy, this breathing-space,
For man's sake more than ever; till the bow,
Restrung o' the sudden, at first cry for help,
Should send some unimaginable shaft
True to the aim and shatteringly through
The plate-mail of a monster, save man so.
He slew the pest o' the marish yesterday:
To-morrow he would bit the flame-breathed stud
That fed on man's-flesh: and this day between —
Because he held it natural to die,
And fruitless to lament a thing past cure,
So, took his fill of food, wine, song and flowers,
Till the new labor claimed him soon enough, —
"Hate him and justly!"

True, Charopé mine!
The man surmised not Herakles lay hid
I' the guest; or, knowing it, was ignorant
That still his lady lived — for Herakles;
Or else judged lightness needs must indicate
This or the other caitiff quality:
And therefore — had been right if not so wrong!
For who expects the sort of him will scratch
A nail's depth, scrape the surface just to see
What peradventure underlies the same?

So, he stood petting up his puny hate,
Parent-wise, proud of the ill-favored babe.
Not long! A great hand, careful lest it crush,
Startled him on the shoulder: up he stared,

And over him, who stood but Herakles!
There smiled the mighty presence, all one smile
And no touch more of the world-weary God,
Through the brief respite. Just a garland's grace
About the brow, a song to satisfy
Head, heart and breast, and trumpet-lips at once,
A solemn draught of true religious wine,
And, — how should I know? — half a mountain goat
Torn up and swallowed down, — the feast was fierce
But brief: all cares and pains took wing and flew,
Leaving the hero ready to begin
And help mankind, whatever woe came next,
Even though what came next should be naught more
Than the mean querulous mouth o' the man, remarked
Pursing its grievance up till patience failed
And the sage needs must rush out, as we saw
To sulk outside and pet his hate in peace.
By no means would the Helper have it so:
He who was just about to handle brutes
In Thrace, and bit the jaws which breathed the flame, —
Well, if a good laugh and a jovial word
Could bridle age which blew bad humors forth,
That were a kind of help, too!

"Thou, there!" hailed
This grand benevolence the ungracious one —
"Why look'st so solemn and so thought-absorbed?
To guests a servant should not sour-faced be,
But do the honors with a mind urbane.
While thou, contrariwise, beholding here
Arrive thy master's comrade, hast for him
A churlish visage, all one beetle-brow —
Having regard to grief that 's out-of-door!

Come hither, and so get to grow more wise!
Things mortal — know'st the nature that they have?
No, I imagine! whence could knowledge spring?
Give ear to me, then! For all flesh to die,
Is nature's due; nor is there any one
Of mortals with assurance he shall last
The coming morrow: for, what 's born of chance
Invisibly proceeds the way it will,
Not to be learned, no fortune-teller's prize.
This, therefore, having heard and known through me,
Gladden thyself! Drink! Count the day-by-day
Existence thine, and all the other — chance!
Ay, and pay homage also to by far
The sweetest of divinities for man,
Kupris! Benignant Goddess will she prove!
But as for aught else, leave and let things be!
And trust my counsel, if I seem to speak
To purpose — as I do, apparently.
Wilt not thou, then, — discarding overmuch
Mournfulness, do away with this shut door,
Come drink along with me, be-garlanded
This fashion? Do so, and — I well know what —
From this stern mood, this shrunk-up state of mind,
The pit-pat fall o' the flagon-juice down throat
Soon will dislodge thee from bad harborage!
Men being mortal should think mortal-like:
Since to your solemn, brow-contracting sort,
All of them, — so I lay down law at least, —
Life is not truly life but misery."

Whereto the man with softened surliness:
"We know as much: but deal with matters, now,
Hardly befitting mirth and revelry."

"No intimate, this woman that is dead:
Mourn not too much! For, those o' the house itself,
Thy masters live, remember!"

"Live indeed?
Ah, thou know'st naught o' the woe within these walls!"
"I do — unless thy master spoke me false
Somehow!"

"Ay, ay, too much he loves a guest,
Too much, that master mine!" so muttered he.

"Was it improper he should treat me well,
Because an alien corpse was in the way?"

"No alien, but most intimate indeed!"

"Can it be, some woe was, he told me not?"

"Farewell and go thy way! Thy cares for thee —
To us, our master's sorrow is a care."

"This word begins no tale of alien woe!"

"Had it been other woe than intimate,
I could have seen thee feast, nor felt amiss."

"What! have I suffered strangely from my host?"

"Thou cam'st not at a fit reception-time:
With sorrow here beforehand: and thou seest
Shorn hair, black robes."

"But who is it that 's dead?
Some child gone? or the aged sire perhaps?"

"Admetos' wife, then! she has perished, guest!"

"How sayest? And did ye house me, all the same?"

"Ay: for he had thee in that reverence
He dared not turn thee from his door away!"

"O hapless, and bereft of what a mate!"

"All of us now are dead, not she alone!"

"But I divined it! seeing, as I did,
His eye that ran with tears, his close-clipt hair,
His countenance! Though he persuaded me,
Saying it was a stranger's funeral
He went with to the grave: against my wish,
He forced on me that I should enter doors,
Drink in the hall o' the hospitable man
Circumstanced so! And do I revel yet
With wreath on head? But — thou to hold thy peace
Nor tell me what a woe oppressed my friend!
Where is he gone to bury her? Where am I
To go and find her?"

'By the road that leads
Straight to Larissa, thou wilt see the tomb,
Out of the suburb, a carved sepulchre."

So said he, and therewith dismissed himself
Inside to his lamenting: somewhat soothed,
However, that he had adroitly spoilt
The mirth of the great creature: oh, he marked
The movement of the mouth, how lip pressed lip,
And either eye forgot to shine, as, fast,
He plucked the chaplet from his forehead, dashed
The myrtle-sprays down, trod them underfoot!
And all the joy and wonder of the wine
Withered away, like fire from off a brand
The wind blows over — beacon though it be,
Whose merry ardor only meant to make

Somebody all the better for its blaze,
And save lost people in the dark: quenched now!

Not long quenched! As the flame, just hurried off
The brand's edge, suddenly renews its bite,
Tasting some richness caked i' the core o' the tree,—
Pine, with a blood that 's oil, — and triumphs up
Pillar-wise to the sky and saves the world:
So, in a spasm and splendor of resolve,
All at once did the God surmount the man.

"O much-enduring heart and hand of mine!
Now show what sort of son she bore to Zeus,
That daughter of Elektruon, Tiruns' child,
Alkmené! for that son must needs save now
The just-dead lady: ay, establish here
I' the house again Alkestis, bring about
Comfort and succor to Admetos so!
I will go lie in wait for Death, black-stoled
King of the corpses! I shall find him, sure,
Drinking, beside the tomb, o' the sacrifice:
And if I lie in ambuscade, and leap
Out of my lair, and seize — encircle him
Till one hand join the other round about —
There lives not who shall pull him out from me,
Rib-mauled, before he let the woman go!
But even say I miss the booty, — say,
Death comes not to the boltered blood, — why then,
Down go I, to the unsunned dwelling-place
Of Koré and the king there, — make demand,
Confident I shall bring Alkestis back,
So as to put her in the hands of him
My host, that housed me, never drove me off:
Though stricken with sore sorrow, hid the stroke,
Being a noble heart and honoring me!

Who of Thessalians, more than this man, loves
The stranger? Who, that now inhabits Greece?
Wherefore he shall not say the man was vile
Whom he befriended, — native noble heart!"

So, one look upward, as if Zeus might laugh
Approval of his human progeny, —
One summons of the whole magnific frame,
Each sinew to its service, — up he caught,
And over shoulder cast, the lion-shag,
Let the club go, — for had he not those hands?
And so went striding off, on that straight way
Leads to Larissa and the suburb tomb.
Gladness be with thee, Helper of our world!
I think this is the authentic sign and seal
Of Godship, that it ever waxes glad,
And more glad, until gladness blossoms, bursts
Into a rage to suffer for mankind,
And recommence at sorrow: drops like seed
After the blossom, ultimate of all.
Say, does the seeds corn earth and seek the sun?
Surely it has no other end and aim
Than to drop, once more die into the ground,
Taste cold and darkness and oblivion there:
And thence rise, tree-like grow through pain to joy,
More joy and most joy, — do man good again.

So, to the struggle off strode Herakles.
When silence closed behind the lion-garb,
Back came our dull fact settling in its place,
Though heartiness and passion half-dispersed
The inevitable fate. And presently
In came the mourners from the funeral,
One after one, until we hoped the last
Would be Alkestis and so end our dream.

Could they have really left Alkestis lone
I' the wayside sepulchre! Home, all save she!
And when Admetos felt that it was so,
By the stand-still: when he lifted head and face
From the two hiding hands and peplos' fold,
And looked forth, knew the palace, knew the hills,
Knew the plains, knew the friendly frequence there,
And no Alkestis any more again,
Why, the whole woe billow-like broke on him.

"O hateful entry, hateful countenance
O' the widowed halls!" — he moaned. "What was to be?
Go there? Stay here? Speak, not speak? All was now
Mad and impossible alike; one way
And only one was sane and safe — to die:
Now he was made aware how dear is death,
How lovable the dead are, how the heart
Yearns in us to go hide where they repose,
When we find sunbeams do no good to see,
Nor earth rests rightly where our footsteps fall.
His wife had been to him the very pledge,
Sun should be sun, earth — earth; the pledge was robbed,
Pact broken, and the world was left no world."

He stared at the impossible mad life:
Stood, while they urged "Advance — advance! Go deep
Into the utter dark, thy palace-core!"
They tried what they called comfort, "touched the quick
Of the ulceration in his soul," he said,
With memories, — "once thy joy was thus and thus!"
True comfort were to let him fling himself

Into the hollow grave o' the tomb, and so
Let him lie dead along with all he loved.

One bade him note that his own family
Boasted a certain father whose sole son,
Worthy bewailment, died: and yet the sire
Bore stoutly up against the blow and lived;
For all that he was childless now, and prone
Already to gray hairs, far on in life.
Could such a good example miss effect?
Why fix foot, stand so, staring at the house,
Why not go in, as that wise kinsman would?

"O that arrangement of the house I know!
How can I enter, how inhabit thee
Now that one cast of fortune changes all?
Oh me, for much divides the then from now!
Then — with those pine-tree torches, Pelian pomp
And marriage-hymns, I entered, holding high
The hand of my dear wife; while many-voiced
The revelry that followed me and her
That 's dead now, — friends felicitating both,
As who were lofty-lineaged, each of us
Born of the best, two wedded and made one;
Now — wail is wedding-chant's antagonist,
And, for white peplos, stoles in sable state
Herald my way to the deserted couch!"

The one word more they ventured was "This grief
Befell thee witless of what sorrow means,
Close after prosperous fortune: but, reflect!
Thou hast saved soul and body. Dead, thy wife —
Living, the love she left. What 's novel here?
Many the man, from whom Death long ago
Loosed the life-partner!"

Then Admetos spoke:
Turned on the comfort, with no tears, this time.
He was beginning to be like his wife.
I told you of that pressure to the point,
Word slow pursuing word in monotone,
Alkestis spoke with; so Admetos, now,
Solemnly bore the burden of the truth.
And as the voice of him grew, gathered strength,
And groaned on, and persisted to the end,
We felt how deep had been descent in grief,
And with what change he came up now to light,
And left behind such littleness as tears.

"Friends, I account the fortune of my wife
Happier than mine, though it seem otherwise:
For, her indeed no grief will ever touch,
And she from many a labor pauses now,
Renowned one! Whereas I, who ought not live,
But do live, by evading destiny,
Sad life am I to lead, I learn at last!
For how shall I bear going in-doors here?
Accosting whom? By whom saluted back,
Shall I have joyous entry? Whither turn?
Inside, the solitude will drive me forth,
When I behold the empty bed — my wife's —
The seat she used to sit upon, the floor
Unsprinkled as when dwellers loved the cool,
The children that will clasp my knees about,
Cry for their mother back: these servants too
Moaning for what a guardian they have lost!
Inside my house such circumstance awaits.
Outside, — Thessalian people's marriage-feasts
And gatherings for talk will harass me,
With overflow of women everywhere;
It is impossible I look on them —

Familiars of my wife and just her age!
And then, whoever is a foe of mine,
And lights on me — why, this will be his word —
'See there! alive ignobly, there he skulks
That played the dastard when it came to die,
And, giving her he wedded, in exchange,
Kept himself out of Hades safe and sound,
The coward! Do you call that creature — man?
He hates his parents for declining death,
Just as if he himself would gladly die!'
This sort of reputation shall I have,
Beside the other ills enough in store.
Ill-famed, ill-faring, — what advantage, friends,
Do you perceive I gain by life for death?"

That was the truth. Vexed waters sank to smooth:
'T was only when the last of bubbles broke,
The latest circlet widened all away
And left a placid level, that up swam
To the surface the drowned truth, in dreadful change.
So, through the quiet and submission, — ay,
Spite of some strong words — (for you miss the tone)
The grief was getting to be infinite —
Grief, friends fell back before. Their office shrank
To that old solace of humanity —
"Being born mortal, bear grief! Why born else?"
And they could only meditate anew.

"They, too, upborne by airy help of song,
And haply science, which can find the stars,
Had searched the heights: had sounded depths as well
By catching much at books where logic lurked,
Yet nowhere found they aught could overcome
Necessity: not any medicine served,

Which Thrakian tablets treasure, Orphic voice
Wrote itself down upon: nor remedy
Which Phoibos gave to the Asklepiadai;
Cutting the roots of many a virtuous herb
To solace overburdened mortals. None!
Of this sole goddess, never may we go
To altar nor to image: sacrifice
She hears not. All to pray for is — 'Approach!
But, oh, no harder on me, awful one,
Than heretofore! Let life endure thee still!
For, whatsoe'er Zeus' nod decree, that same
In concert with thee hath accomplishment.
Iron, the very stuff o' the Chaluboi,
Thou, by sheer strength, dost conquer and subdue;
Nor, of that harsh abrupt resolve of thine,
Any relenting is there!"
"O my king!
Thee also, in the shackles of those hands,
Not to be shunned, the Goddess grasped! Yet, bear!
Since never wilt thou lead from underground
The dead ones, wail thy worst! If mortals die, —
The very children of immortals, too,
Dropped 'mid our darkness, these decay as sure!
Dear indeed was she while among us: dear,
Now she is dead, must she forever be:
Thy portion was to clasp, within thy couch,
The noblest of all women as a wife.
Nor be the tomb of her supposed some heap
That hides mortality: but like the Gods
Honored, a veneration to a world
Of wanderers! Oft the wanderer, struck thereby,
Who else had sailed past in his merchant-ship,
Ay, he shall leave ship, land, long wind his way
Up to the mountain-summit, till there break
Speech forth 'So, this was she, then, died of old

To save her husband! now, a deity
She bends above us. Hail, benignant one!
Give good!' Such voices so will supplicate.

"But — can it be? Alkmené's offspring comes,
Admetos! — to thy house advances here!"

I doubt not, they supposed him decently
Dead somewhere in that winter world of Thrace —
Vanquished by one o' the Bistones, or else
Victim to some mad steed's voracity —
For did not friends prognosticate as much?
It were a new example to the point,
That "children of immortals, dropped by stealth
Into our darkness, die as sure as we!"
A case to quote and comfort people with:
But, as for lamentation, ai and pheu,
Right-minded subjects kept them for their lord.

Ay, he it was advancing! In he strode,
And took his stand before Admetos, — turned
Now by despair to such a quietude,
He neither raised his face nor spoke, this time,
The while his friend surveyed him steadily.
That friend looked rough with fighting: had he strained
Worst brute to breast was ever strangled yet?
Somehow, a victory — for there stood the strength,
Happy, as always; something grave, perhaps;
The great vein-cordage on the fret-worked front,
Black-swollen, beaded yet with battle-dew
The yellow hair o' the hero! — his big frame
A-quiver with each muscle sinking back
Into the sleepy smooth it leaped from late.
Under the great guard of one arm, there leant

A shrouded something, live and woman-like,
Propped by the heart-beats 'neath the lion-coat.
When he had finished his survey, it seemed,
The heavings of the heart began subside,
The helpful breath returned, and last the smile
Shone out, all Herakles was back again,
As the words followed the saluting hand.

"To friendly man, behoves we freely speak,
Admetos! — nor keep buried, deep in breast,
Blame we leave silent. I assuredly
Judged myself proper, if I should approach
By accident calamities of thine,
To be demonstrably thy friend: but thou
Told'st me not of the corpse then claiming care,
That was thy wife's, but didst install me guest
I' the house here, as though busied with a grief
Indeed, but then, mere grief beyond thy gate:
And so, I crowned my head, and to the Gods
Poured my libations in thy dwelling-place,
With such misfortune round me. And I blame —
Certainly blame thee, having suffered thus!
But still I would not pain thee, pained enough:
So let is pass! Wherefore I seek thee now,
Having turned back again though onward bound,
That I will tell thee. Take and keep for me
This woman, till I come thy way again,
Driving before me, having killed the king
O' the Bistones, that drove of Thrakian steeds:
In such case, give the woman back to me!
But should I fare, — as fare I fain would not,
Seeing I hope to prosper and return, —
Then, I bequeath her as thy household slave.
She came into my hands with good hard toil!
For, what find I, when started on my course,

But certain people, a whole country-side,
Holding a wrestling-bout? as good to me
As a new labor: whence I took, and here
Come keeping with me, this, the victor's prize.
For, such as conquered in the easy work,
Gained horses which they drove away: and such
As conquered in the harder, — those who boxed
And wrestled, — cattle; and, to crown the prize,
A woman followed. Chancing as I did,
Base were it to forego this fame and gain!
Well, as I said, I trust her to thy care:
No woman I have kidnapped, understand!
But good hard toil has done it: here I come!
Some day, who knows? even thou wilt praise the feat!"

Admetos raised his face and eyed the pair:
Then, hollowly and with submission, spoke,
And spoke again, and spoke time after time,
When he perceived the silence of his friend
Would not be broken by consenting word.
As a tired slave goes adding stone to stone
Until he stops some current that molests,
So poor Admetos piled up argument
Vainly against the purpose all too plain
In that great brow acquainted with command.

"Nowise dishonoring, nor amid my foes
Ranking thee, did I hide my wife's ill fate;
But it were grief superimposed on grief,
Shouldst thou have hastened to another home.
My own woe was enough for me to weep!
But, for this woman, — if it so may be, —
Bid some Thessalian, — I entreat thee, king! —
Keep her, — who has not suffered like myself!

Many of the Pheraioi welcome thee.
Be no reminder to me of my ills!
I could not, if I saw her come to live,
Restrain the tear! Inflict on me diseased
No new disease: woe bends me down enough!
Then, where could she be sheltered in my house,
Female and young too? For that she is young,
The vesture and adornment prove. Reflect!
Should such an one inhabit the same roof
With men? And how, mixed up, a girl, with youths,
Shall she keep pure, in that case? No light task
To curb the May-day youngster, Herakles!
I only speak because of care for thee.
Or must I, in avoidance of such harm,
Make her to enter, lead her life within
The chamber of the dead one, all apart?
How shall I introduce this other, couch
This where Alkestis lay? A double blame
I apprehend: first, from the citizens —
Lest some tongue of them taunt that I betray
My benefactress, fall into the snare
Of a new fresh face: then, the dead one's self, —
Will she not blame me likewise? Worthy, sure,
Of worship from me! circumspect my ways,
And jealous of a fault, are bound to be.
But thou, — O woman, whosoe'er thou art,
Know, thou hast all the form, art like as like
Alkestis, in the bodily shape! Ah me!
Take, — by the Gods, — this woman from my sight,
Lest thou undo me, the undone before!
Since I seem — seeing her — as if I saw
My own wife! And confusions cloud my heart,
And from my eyes the springs break forth! Ah me
Unhappy — how I taste for the first time
My misery in all its bitterness!"

Whereat the friends conferred: "The chance, in truth,
Was an untoward one — none said otherwise.
Still, what a God comes giving, good or bad,
That, one should take and bear with. Take her, then!"

Herakles, — not unfastening his hold
On that same misery, beyond mistake
Hoarse in the words, convulsive in the face, —
"I would that I had such a power," said he,
"As to lead up into the light again
Thy very wife, and grant thee such a grace."

"Well do I know thou wouldst: but where the hope?
There is no bringing back the dead to light."

"Be not extravagant in grief, no less!
Bear it, by augury of better things!"

"'T is easier to advise 'bear up,' than bear!"

"But how carve way i' the life that lies before,
If bent on groaning ever for the past?"

"I myself know that: but a certain love
Allures me to the choice I shall not change."

"Ay, but, still loving dead ones, still makes weep."

"And let it be so! She has ruined me,
And still more than I say: that answers all."

"Oh, thou hast lost a brave wife: who disputes?"

"So brave a one — that he whom thou behold'st
Will never more enjoy his life again!"

"Time will assuage! The evil yet is young!"

"Time, thou mayst say, will; if time mean — to die."

"A wife — the longing for new marriage-joys
Will stop thy sorrow!"

"Hush, friend, — hold thy peace!
What hast thou said! I could not credit ear!"

"How then? Thou wilt not marry, then, but keep
A widowed couch?"

"There is not any one
Of womankind shall couch with whom thou seest!"

"Dost think to profit thus in any way
The dead one?"

"Her, wherever she abide,
My duty is to honor."

"And I praise —
Indeed I praise thee! Still, thou hast to pay
The price of it, in being held a fool!"

"Fool call me — only one name call me not!
Bridegroom!"

"No: it was praise, I proportioned thee,
Of being good true husband to thy wife!"

"When I betray her, though she is no more,
May I die!"

And the thing he said was true:
For out of Herakles a great glow broke.
There stood a victor worthy of a prize:
The violet-crown that withers on the brow
Of the half-hearted claimant. Oh, he knew,
The signs of battle hard fought and well won,
This queller of the monsters! — knew his friend
Planted firm foot, now, on the loathly thing
That was Admetos late! "would die," he knew,

Ere let the reptile raise its crest again.
If that was truth, why try the true friend more?

"Then, since thou canst be faithful to the death,
Take, deep into thy house, my dame!" smiled he.

"Not so! — I pray, by thy Progenitor!"

"Thou wilt mistake in disobeying me!"

"Obeying thee, I have to break my heart!"

"Obey me! Who knows but the favor done
May fall into its place as duty too?"

So, he was humble, would decline no more
Bearing a burden: he just sighed "Alas!
Wouldst thou hadst never brought this prize from game!"

"Yet, when I conquered there, thou conqueredst!"

"All excellently urged! Yet — spite of all,
Bear with me! let the woman go away!"

"She shall go, if needs must: but ere she go,
See if there *is* need!"

"Need there is! At least,
Except I make thee angry with me, so!"

"But I persist, because I have my spice
Of intuition likewise: take the dame!"

"Be thou the victor, then! But certainly
Thou dost thy friend no pleasure in the act!"

"Oh, time will come when thou shalt praise me! Now —
Only obey!"

"Then, servants, since my house
Must needs receive this woman, take her there!"

"I shall not trust this woman to the care
Of servants."
"Why, conduct her in, thyself,
If that seem preferable!"
"I prefer,
With thy good leave, to place her in thy hands!"

"I would not touch her! Entry to the house —
That, I concede thee."
"To thy sole right hand,
I mean to trust her!"
"King! Thou wrenchest this
Out of me by main force, if I submit!"

"Courage, friend! Come, stretch hand forth! Good!
Now touch
The stranger-woman!"
"There! A hand I stretch —
As though it meant to cut off Gorgon's head!"

"Hast hold of her?"
"Fast hold."
"Why, then, hold fast
And have her! and, one day, asseverate
Thou wilt, I think, thy friend, the son of Zeus,
He was the gentle guest to entertain!
Look at her! See if she, in any way,
Present thee with resemblance of thy wife!"

Ah, but the tears come, find the words at fault!
There is no telling how the hero twitched
The veil off: and there stood, with such fixed eyes
And such slow smile, Alkestis' silent self!

It was the crowning grace of that great heart,
To keep back joy: procrastinate the truth
Until the wife, who had made proof and found
The husband wanting, might essay once more,
Hear, see, and feel him renovated now —
Able to do, now, all herself had done,
Risen to the height of her: so, hand in hand,
The two might go together, live and die.

Beside, when he found speech, you guess the speech.
He could not think he saw his wife again:
It was some mocking God that used the bliss
To make him mad! Till Herakles must help:
Assure him that no spectre mocked at all;
He was embracing whom he buried once.
Still, — did he touch, might he address the true, —
True eye, true body of the true live wife?

And Herakles said, smiling, "All was truth.
Spectre? Admetos had not made his guest
One who played ghost-invoker, or such cheat!
Oh, he might speak and have response, in time!
All heart could wish was gained now — life for death:
Only, the rapture must not grow immense:
Take care, nor wake the envy of the Gods!"

"Oh thou, of greatest Zeus true son," — so spoke
Admetos when the closing word must come,
"Go ever in a glory of success,
And save, that sire, his offspring to the end!
For thou hast — only thou — raised me and mine
Up again to this light and life!" Then asked
Tremblingly, how was trod the perilous path
Out of the dark into the light and life:
How it had happened with Alkestis there.

And Herakles said little, but enough —
How he engaged in combat with that king
O' the dæmons: how the field of contest lay
By the tomb's self: how he sprang from ambuscade,
Captured Death, caught him in that pair of hands.

But all the time, Alkestis moved not once
Out of the set gaze and the silent smile;
And a cold fear ran through Admetos' frame:
"Why does she stand and front me, silent thus?"

Herakles solemnly replied "Not yet
Is it allowable thou hear the things
She has to tell thee; let evanish quite
That consecration to the lower Gods,
And on our upper world the third day rise!
Lead her in, meanwhile; good and true thou art,
Good, true, remain thou! Practise piety
To stranger-guests the old way! So, farewell!
Since forth I fare, fulfil my urgent task
Set by the king, the son of Sthenelos."

Fain would Admetos keep that splendid smile
Ever to light him. "Stay with us, thou heart!
Remain our house-friend!"

"At some other day!
Now, of necessity, I haste!" smiled he.

"But mayst thou prosper, go forth on a foot
Sure to return! Through all the tetrarchy
Command my subjects that they institute
Thanksgiving-dances for the glad event,
And bid each altar smoke with sacrifice!
For we are minded to begin a fresh

Existence, better than the life before;
Seeing I own myself supremely blest."

Whereupon all the friendly moralists
Drew this conclusion: chirped, each beard to each:
"Manifold are thy shapings, Providence!
Many a hopeless matter Gods arrange.
What we expected never came to pass:
What we did not expect, Gods brought to bear;
So have things gone, this whole experience through!

---

Ah, but if you had seen the play itself!
They say, my poet failed to get the prize:
Sophokles got the prize, — great name! They say,
Sophokles also means to make a piece,
Model a new Admetos, a new wife:
Success to him! One thing has many sides.
The great name! But no good supplants a good,
Nor beauty undoes beauty. Sophokles
Will carve and carry a fresh cup, brimful
Of beauty and good, firm to the altar-foot,
And glorify the Dionusiac shrine:
Not clash against this crater in the place
Where the God put it when his mouth had drained,
To the last dregs, libation life-blood-like,
And praised Euripides for evermore —
*The Human with his droppings of warm tears.*

Still, since one thing may have so many sides,
I think I see how, — far from Sophokles, —
You, I, or any one might mould a new
Admetos, new Alkestis. Ah, that brave
Bounty of poets, the one royal race
That ever was, or will be, in this world!
They give no gift that bounds itself and ends

I' the giving and the taking: theirs so breeds
I' the heart and soul o' the taker, so transmutes
The man who only was a man before,
That he grows godlike in his turn, can give —
He also: share the poets' privilege,
Bring forth new good, new beauty, from the old.
As though the cup that gave the wine, gave, too,
The God's prolific giver of the grape,
That vine, was wont to find out, fawn around
His footstep, springing still to bless the dearth,
At bidding of a Mainad. So with me:
For I have drunk this poem, quenched my thirst,
Satisfied heart and soul — yet more remains!
Could we too make a poem? Try at least,
Inside the head, what shape the rose-mists take!

When God Apollon took, for punishment,
A mortal form and sold himself a slave
To King Admetos till a term should end, —
Not only did he make, in servitude,
Such music, while he fed the flocks and herds,
As saved the pasturage from wrong or fright,
Curing rough creatures of ungentleness:
Much more did that melodious wisdom work
Within the heart o' the master: there, ran wild
Many a lust and greed that grow to strength
By preying on the native pity and care,
Would else, all undisturbed, possess the land.

And these, the God so tamed, with golden tongue,
That, in the plenitude of youth and power,
Admetos vowed himself to rule thenceforth
In Pherai solely for his people's sake,
Subduing to such end each lust and greed
That dominates the natural charity.

And so the struggle ended. Right ruled might:
And soft yet brave, and good yet wise, the man
Stood up to be a monarch; having learned
The worth of life, life's worth would he bestow
On all whose lot was cast, to live or die,
As he determined for the multitude.
So stands a statue: pedestalled sublime,
Only that it may wave the thunder off,
And ward, from winds that vex, a world below.

And then, — as if a whisper found its way
E'en to the sense o' the marble, — "Vain thy vow!
The royalty of its resolve, that head
Shall hide within the dust ere day be done:
That arm, its outstretch of beneficence,
Shall have a speedy ending on the earth:
Lie patient, prone, while light some cricket leaps
And takes possession of the masterpiece,
To sit, sing louder as more near the sun.
For why? A flaw was in the pedestal;
Who knows? A worm's work! Sapped, the certain fate
O' the statue is to fall, and thine to die!"

Whereat the monarch, calm, addressed himself
To die, but bitterly the soul outbroke —
"O prodigality of life, blind waste
I' the world, of power profuse without the will
To make life do its work, deserve its day!
My ancestors pursued their pleasure, poured
The blood o' the people out in idle war,
Or took occasion of some weary peace
To bid men dig down deep or build up high,
Spend bone and marrow that the king might feast
Entrenched and buttressed from the vulgar gaze.

Yet they all lived, nay, lingered to old age:
As though Zeus loved that they should laugh to scorn
The vanity of seeking other ends
In rule than just the ruler's pastime. They
Lived; I must die."
And, as some long last moan
Of a minor suddenly is propped beneath
By note which, new-struck, turns the wail, that was,
Into a wonder and a triumph, so
Began Alkestis: "Nay, thou art to live!
The glory that, in the disguise of flesh,
Was helpful to our house, — he prophesied
The coming fate: whereon, I pleaded sore
That he, — I guessed a God, who to his couch
Amid the clouds must go and come again,
While we were darkling, — since he loved us both,
He should permit thee, at whatever price,
To live and carry out to heart's content
Soul's purpose, turn each thought to very deed,
Nor let Zeus lose the monarch meant in thee."

"To which Apollon, with a sunset smile,
Sadly — 'And so should mortals arbitrate!
It were unseemly if they aped us Gods,
And, mindful of our chain of consequence,
Lost care of the immediate earthly link:
Forwent the comfort of life's little hour,
In prospect of some cold abysmal blank
Alien eternity, — unlike the time
They know, and understand to practise with, —
No, — our eternity — no heart's blood, bright
And warm outpoured in its behoof, would tinge
Never so palely, warm a whit the more:
Whereas retained and treasured — left to beat
Joyously on, a life's length, in the breast

O' the loved and loving — it would throb itself
Through, and suffuse the earthly tenement,
Transform it, even as your mansion here
Is love-transformed into a temple-home
Where I, a God, forget the Olumpian glow,
I' the feel of human richness like the rose:
Your hopes and fears, so blind and yet so sweet
With death about them. Therefore, well in thee
To look, not on eternity, but time:
To apprehend that, should Admetos die,
All, we Gods purposed in him, dies as sure:
That, life's link snapping, all our chain is lost.
And yet a mortal glance might pierce, methinks,
Deeper into the seeming dark of things,
And learn, no fruit, man's life can bear, will fade:
Learn, if Admetos die now, so much more
Will pity for the frailness found in flesh,
Will terror at the earthly chance and change
Frustrating wisest scheme of noblest soul,
Will these go wake the seeds of good asleep
Throughout the world: as oft a rough wind sheds
The unripe promise of some field-flower, — true!
But loosens too the level, and lets breathe
A thousand captives for the year to come.
Nevertheless, obtain thy prayer, stay fate!
Admetos lives — if thou wilt die for him!'"

"So was the pact concluded that I die,
And thou live on, live for thyself, for me,
For all the world. Embrace and bid me hail,
Husband, because I have the victory —
Am, heart, soul, head to foot, one happiness!"

Whereto Admetos, in a passionate cry,
"Never, by that true word Apollon spoke!

All the unwise wish is unwished, oh wife!
Let purposes of Zeus fulfil themselves,
If not through me, then through some other man!
Still, in myself he had a purpose too,
Inalienably mine, to end with me:
This purpose — that, throughout my earthly life,
Mine should be mingled and made up with thine, —
And we two prove one force and play one part
And do one thing. Since death divides the pair,
'T is well that I depart and thou remain
Who wast to me as spirit is to flesh:
Let the flesh perish, be perceived no more,
So thou, the spirit that informed the flesh,
Bend yet awhile, a very flame above
The rift I drop into the darkness by, —
And bid remember, flesh and spirit once
Worked in the world, one body, for man's sake.
Never be that abominable show
Of passive death without a quickening life —
Admetos only, no Alkestis now!"

Then she: "O thou Admetos, must the pile
Of truth on truth, which needs but one truth more
To tower up in completeness, trophy-like,
Emprise of man, and triumph of the world,
Must it go ever to the ground again
Because of some faint heart or faltering hand,
Which we, that breathless world about the base,
Trusted should carry safe to altitude,
Superimpose o' the summit, our supreme
Achievement, our victorious coping-stone?
Shall thine, Beloved, prove the hand and heart
That fail again, flinch backward at the truth
Would cap and crown the structure this last time,—
Precipitate our monumental hope

And strew the earth ignobly yet once more?
See how, truth piled on truth, the structure wants,
Waits just the crowning truth I claim of thee!
Wouldst thou, for any joy to be enjoyed,
For any sorrow that thou mightst escape,
Unwill thy will to reign a righteous king?
Nowise! And were there two lots, death and life, —
Life, wherein good resolve should go to air,
Death, whereby finest fancy grew plain fact
I' the reign of thy survivor, — life or death?
Certainly death, thou choosest. Here stand I
The wedded, the beloved one: hadst thou loved
Her who less worthily could estimate
Both life and death than thou? Not so should say
Admetos, whom Apollon made some court
Alkestis in a car, submissive brutes
Of blood were yoked to, symbolizing soul
Must dominate unruly sense in man.
Then, shall Admetos and Alkestis see
Good alike, and alike choose, each for each,
Good, — and yet, each for other, at the last,
Choose evil? What? thou soundest in my soul
To depths below the deepest, reachest good
In evil, that makes evil good again,
And so allottest to me that I live
And not die — letting die, not thee alone,
But all true life that lived in both of us?
Look at me once ere thou decree the lot!"

Therewith her whole soul entered into his,
He looked the look back, and Alkestis died.

And even while it lay, i' the look of him,
Dead, the dimmed body, bright Alkestis' soul
Had penetrated through the populace

Of ghosts, was got to Koré, — throned and crowned
The pensive queen o' the twilight, where she dwells
Forever in a muse, but half away
From flowery earth she lost and hankers for, —
And there demanded to become a ghost
Before the time.

Whereat the softened eyes
Of the lost maidenhood that lingered still
Straying among the flowers in Sicily,
Sudden was startled back to Hades' throne
By that demand: broke through humanity
Into the orbed omniscience of a God,
Searched at a glance Alkestis to the soul,
And said — while a long slow sigh lost itself
I' the hard and hollow passage of a laugh:

"Hence, thou deceiver! This is not to die,
If, by the very death which mocks me now,
The life, that 's left behind and past my power,
Is formidably doubled. Say, there fight
Two athletes, side by side, each athlete armed
With only half the weapons, and no more,
Adequate to a contest with their foe:
If one of these should fling helm, sword and shield
To fellow — shieldless, swordless, helmless late —
And so leap naked o'er the barrier, leave
A combatant equipped from head to heel,
Yet cry to the other side 'Receive a friend
Who fights no longer!' 'Back, friend, to the fray!'
Would be the prompt rebuff; I echo it.
Two souls in one were formidable odds:
Admetos must not be himself and thou!"

And so, before the embrace relaxed a whit,
The lost eyes opened, still beneath the look;

And lo, Alkestis was alive again,
And of Admetos' rapture who shall speak?

So, the two lived together long and well.
But never could I learn, by word of scribe
Or voice of poet, rumor wafts our way,
That — of the scheme of rule in righteousness,
The bringing back again the Golden Age,
Which, rather than renounce, our pair would die —
That ever one faint particle came true,
With both alive to bring it to effect:
Such is the envy Gods still bear mankind!

So might our version of the story prove,
And no Euripidean pathos plague
Too much my critic-friend of Syracuse.

"Besides your poem failed to get the prize:
(That is, the first prize: second prize is none.)
Sophokles got it!" Honor the great name!
All cannot love two great names; yet some do:
I know the poetess who graved in gold,
Among her glories that shall never fade,
This style and title for Euripides,
*The Human with his droppings of warm tears.*

I know, too, a great Kaunian painter, strong
As Herakles, though rosy with a robe
Of grace that softens down the sinewy strength:
And he has made a picture of it all.
There lies Alkestis dead, beneath the sun,
She longed to look her last upon, beside
The sea, which somehow tempts the life in us
To come trip over its white waste of waves,
And try escape from earth, and fleet as free.

Behind the body, I suppose there bends
Old Pheres in his hoary impotence;
And women-wailers, in a corner crouch
— Four, beautiful as you four — yes, indeed! —
Close, each to other, agonizing all,
As fastened, in fear's rhythmic sympathy,
To two contending opposite. There strains
The might o' the hero 'gainst his more than match,
— Death, dreadful not in thew and bone, but like
The envenomed substance that exudes some dew
Whereby the merely honest flesh and blood
Will fester up and run to ruin straight,
Ere they can close with, clasp and overcome
The poisonous impalpability
That stimulates a form beneath the flow
Of those gray garments; I pronounce that piece
Worthy to set up in our Poikilé!

And all came, — glory of the golden verse,
And passion of the picture, and that fine
Frank outgush of the human gratitude
Which saved our ship and me, in Syracuse, —
Ay, and the tear or two which slipt perhaps
Away from you, friends, while I told my tale,
— It all came of this play that gained no prize!
Why crown whom Zeus has crowned in soul before?

# ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

INCLUDING A TRANSCRIPT FROM EURIPIDES: BEING

## THE LAST ADVENTURE OF BALAUSTION

1875

*οὐκ ἔσθω κενέβρει' · ὁπόταν δὲ θύῃς τι, κάλει με.*

I eat no carrion; when you sacrifice
Some cleanly creature — call me for a slice!

Wind, wave, and bark, bear Euthukles and me,
Balaustion, from — not sorrow but despair,
Not memory but the present and its pang!
Athenai, live thou hearted in my heart:
Never, while I live, may I see thee more,
Never again may these repugnant orbs
Ache themselves blind before the hideous pomp,
The ghastly mirth which mocked thine overthrow
— Death's entry, Haides' outrage!
Doomed to die, —
Fire should have flung a passion of embrace
About thee till, resplendently inarmed,
(Temple by temple folded to his breast,
All thy white wonder fainting out in ash)
Lightly some vaporous sigh of soul escaped,
And so the Immortals bade Athenai back!
Or earth might sunder and absorb thee, save,
Buried below Olumpos and its gods,
Akropolis to dominate her realm

For Koré, and console the ghosts; or, sea
What if thy watery plural vastitude,
Rolling unanimous advance, had rushed,
Might upon might, a moment, — stood, one stare,
Sea-face to city-face, thy glaucous wave
Glassing that marbled last magnificence, —
Till fate's pale tremulous foam-flower tipped the gray,
And when wave broke and overswarmed and, sucked
To bounds back, multitudinously ceased,
Let land again breathe unconfused with sea,
Attiké was, Athenai was not now!

Such end I could have borne, for I had shared.
But this which, glanced at, aches within my orbs
To blinding, — bear me thence, bark, wind and wave!
Me, Euthukles, and, hearted in each heart,
Athenai, undisgraced as Pallas' self,
Bear to my birthplace, Helios' island-bride,
Zeus' darling: thither speed us, homeward-bound,
Wafted already twelve hours' sail away
From horror, nearer by one sunset Rhodes!

Why should despair be? Since, distinct above
Man's wickedness and folly, flies the wind
And floats the cloud, free transport for our soul
Out of its fleshly durance dim and low, —
Since disembodied soul anticipates
(Thought-borne as now, in rapturous unrestraint)
Above all crowding, crystal silentness,
Above all noise, a silver solitude: —
Surely, where thought so bears soul, soul in time
May permanently bide, "assert the wise,"
There live in peace, there work in hope once more —
O nothing doubt, Philemon! Greed and strife,

Hatred and cark and care, what place have they
In yon blue liberality of heaven?
How the sea helps! How rose-smit earth will rise
Breast-high thence, some bright morning, and be
Rhodes!
Heaven, earth and sea, my warrant — in their name,
Believe — o'er falsehood, truth is surely sphered,
O'er ugliness beams beauty, o'er this world
Extends that realm where, "as the wise assert,"
Philemon, thou shalt see Euripides
Clearer than mortal sense perceived the man!

A sunset nearer Rhodes, by twelve hours' sweep
Of surge secured from horror? Rather say,
Quieted out of weakness into strength.
I dare invite, survey the scene my sense
Staggered to apprehend: for, disenvolved
From the mere outside anguish and contempt,
Slowly a justice centered in a doom
Reveals itself. Ay, pride succumbed to pride,
Oppression met the oppressor and was matched.
Athenai's vaunt braved Sparté's violence
Till, in the shock, prone fell Peiraios, low
Rampart and bulwark lay, as, — timing stroke
Of hammer, axe, and beam hoist, poised and swung, —
The very flute-girls blew their laughing best,
In dance about the conqueror while he bade
Music and merriment help enginery
Batter down, break to pieces all the trust
Of citizens once, slaves now. See what walls
Play substitute for the long double range
Themistoklean, heralding a guest
From harbor on to citadel! Each side
Their senseless walls demolished stone by stone,
See, — outer wall as stonelike, — heads and hearts, —

Athenai's terror-stricken populace!
Prattlers, tongue-tied in crouching abjectness, —
Braggarts, who wring hands wont to flourish swords —
Sophist and rhetorician, demagogue,
(Argument dumb, authority a jest)
Dikast, and heliast, pleader, litigant,
Quack-priest, sham-prophecy-retailer, scout
O' the customs, sycophant, whate'er the style,
Altar-scrap-snatcher, pimp and parasite, —
Rivalities at truce now each with each,
Stupefied mud-banks, — such an use they serve!
While the one order which performs exact
To promise, functions faithful last as first,
What is it but the city's lyric troop,
Chantress and psaltress, flute-girl, dancing-girl?
Athenai's harlotry takes laughing care
Their patron miss no pipings, late she loved,
But deathward tread at least the kordax-step.

Die then, who pulled such glory on your heads!
There let it grind to powder! Perikles!
The living are the dead now: death be life!
Why should the sunset yonder waste its wealth?
Prove thee Olympian! If my heart supply
Inviolate the structure, — true to type.
Build me some spirit-place no flesh shall find,
As Pheidias may inspire thee: slab on slab,
Renew Athenai, quarry out the cloud,
Convert to gold yon west extravagance!
'Neath Propulaia, from Akropolis
By vapory grade and grade, gold all the way,
Step to thy snow-Pnux, mount thy Bema cloud,
Thunder and lighten thence a Hellas through
That shall be better and more beautiful

And too august for Sparté's foot to spurn!
Chasmed in the crag, again our Theatre
Predominates, one purple: Staghunt-month,
Brings it not Dionusia? Hail, the Three!
Aischulos, Sophokles, Euripides
Compete, gain prize or lose prize, godlike still.
Nay, lest they lack the old god-exercise —
Their noble want the unworthy, — as of old,
(How otherwise should patience crown their might?)
What if each find his ape promoted man,
His censor raised for antic service still?
Some new Hermippos to pelt Perikles,
Kratinos to swear Pheidias robbed a shrine,
Eruxis — I suspect, Euripides,
No brow will ache because with mop and mow
He gibes my poet! There 's a dog-faced dwarf
That gets to godship somehow, yet retains
His apehood in the Egyptian hierarchy,
More decent, indecorous just enough:
Why should not dog-ape, graced in due degree,
Grow Momos as thou Zeus? Or didst thou sigh
Rightly with thy Makaria? "After life,
Better no sentiency than turbulence;
Death cures the low contention." Be it so!
Yet progress means contention, to my mind.
Euthukles, who, except for love that speaks,
Art silent by my side while words of mine
Provoke that foe from which escape is vain
Henceforward, wake Athenai's fate and fall, —
Memories asleep as, the altar-foot
Those Furies in the Oresteian song, —
Do I amiss who, wanting strength, use craft,
Advance upon the foe I cannot fly,
Nor feign a snake is dormant though it gnaw?
That fate and fall, once bedded in our brain,

Roots itself past upwrenching; but coaxed forth,
Encouraged out to practise fork and fang, —
Perhaps, when satiate with prompt sustenance,
It may pine, likelier die than if left swell
In peace by our pretension to ignore,
Or pricked to threefold fury, should our stamp
Bruise and not brain the pest.

A middle course!
What hinders that we treat this tragic theme
As the Three taught when either woke some woe,
— How Klutaimnestra hated, what the pride
Of Iokastê, why Medeia clove
Nature asunder. Small rebuked by large,
We felt our puny hates refine to air,
Our poor prides sink, prevent the humbling hand,
Our petty passions purify their tide.
So, Euthukles, permit the tragedy
To re-enact itself, this voyage through,
Till sunsets end and sunrise brighten Rhodes!
Majestic on the stage of memory,
Peplosed and kothorned, let Athenai fall
Once more, nay, oft again till life conclude,
Lent for the lesson: Choros, I and thou!
What else in life seems piteous any more
After such pity, or proves terrible
Beside such terror?

Still — since Phrunichos
Offended, by too premature a touch
Of that Milesian smart-place freshly frayed —
(Ah, my poor people, whose prompt remedy
Was — fine the poet, not reform thyself!)
Beware precipitate approach! Rehearse
Rather the prologue, well a year away,

Than the main misery, a sunset old.
What else but fitting prologue to the piece
Style on adventure, stranger than my first
By so much as the issue it enwombed
Lurked big beyond Balaustion's littleness?
Second supreme adventure! O that Spring,
That eve I told the earlier to my friends!
Where are the four now, with each red-ripe mouth
Crumpled so close, no quickest breath it fetched
Could disengage the lip-flower furled to bud
For fear Admetos, — shivering head and foot,
As with sick soul and blind averted face
He trusted hand forth to obey his friend, —
Should find no wife in her cold hand's response,
Nor see the disenshrouded statue start
Alkestis, live the life and love the love!
I wonder, does the streamlet ripple still,
Outsmoothing galingale and watermint
Its mat-floor? while at brim, 'twixt sedge and sedge,
What bubblings past Baccheion, broadened much,
Pricked by the reed and fretted by the fly,
Oared by the boatman-spider's pair of arms!
Lenaia was a gladsome month ago —
Euripides had taught "Andromedé:"
Next month, would teach "Kresphontes" — which
same month
Some one from Phokis, who companioned me
Since all that happened on those temple-steps,
Would marry me and turn Athenian too.
Now! if next year the masters let the slaves
Do Bacchic service and restore mankind
That trilogy whereof, 't is noised, one play
Presents the Bacchai, — no Euripides
Will teach the choros, nor shall we be tinged
By any such grand sunset of his soul,

Exiles from dead Athenai, — not the live
That 's in the cloud there with the new-born star!

Speak to the infinite intelligence,
Sing to the everlasting sympathy!
Winds belly sail, and drench of dancing brine
Buffet our boat-side, so the prore bound free!
Condense our voyage into one great day
Made up of sunset-closes: eve by eve,
Resume that memorable night-discourse
When, — like some meteor-brilliance, fire and filth,
Or say, his own Amphitheos, deity
And dung, who, bound on the gods' embassage,
Got men's acknowledgment in kick and cuff —
We made acquaintance with a visitor
Ominous, apparitional, who went
Strange as he came, but shall not pass away.
Let us attempt that memorable talk,
Clothe the adventure's every incident
With due expression: may not looks be told,
Gesture made speak, and speech so amplified
That words find blood-warmth which, cold-writ, they lose?

Recall the night we heard the news from Thrace,
One year ago, Athenai still herself.

We two were sitting silent in the house,
Yet cheerless hardly. Euthukles, forgive!
I somehow speak to unseen auditors.
Not *you*, but — Euthukles had entered, grave,
Grand, may I say, as who brings laurel-branch
And message from the tripod: such it proved.

He first removed the garland from his brow,
Then took my hand and looked into my face.

"Speak good words!" much misgiving faltered I.

"Good words, the best, Balaustion! He is crowned,
Gone with his Attic ivy home to feast,
Since Aischulos required companionship.
Pour a libation for Euripides!"

When we had sat the heavier silence out —
"Dead and triumphant still!" began reply
To my eye's question. "As he willed he worked:
And, as he worked, he wanted not, be sure,
Triumph his whole life through, submitting work
To work's right judges, never to the wrong —
To competency, not ineptitude.
When he had run life's proper race and worked
Quite to the stade's end, there remained to try
The stade's turn, should strength dare the double course.
Half the diaulos reached, the hundred plays
Accomplished, force in its rebound sufficed
To lift along the athlete and ensure
A second wreath, proposed by fools for first,
The statist's olive as the poet's bay.
Wiselier, he suffered not a twofold aim
Retard his pace, confuse his sight; at once
Poet and statist; though the multitude
Girded him ever 'All thine aim thine art?
The idle poet only? No regard
For civic duty, public service, here?
We drop our ballot-bean for Sophokles!
Not only could he write "Antigoné,"
But — since (we argued) whoso penned that piece
Might just as well conduct a squadron, — straight
Good-naturedly he took on him command,
Got laughed at, and went back to making plays,

Having allowed us our experiment
Respecting the fit use of faculty.'
No whit the more did athlete slacken pace.
Soon the jeers grew: 'Cold hater of his kind,
A sea-cave suits him, not the vulgar hearth!
What need of tongue-talk, with a bookish store
Would stock ten cities?' Shadow of an ass!
No whit the worse did athlete touch the mark
And, at the turning-point, consign his scorn
O' the scorners to that final trilogy
'Hupsipule,' 'Phoinissai,' and the Match
Of Life Contemplative with Active Life,
Zethos against Amphion. Ended so?
Nowise! — began again; for heroes rest
Dropping shield's oval o'er the entire man,
And he who thus took Contemplation's prize
Turned stade-point but to face Activity.
Out of all shadowy hands extending help
For life's decline pledged to youth's labor still,
Whatever renovation flatter age, —
Society with pastime, solitude
With peace, — he chose the hand that gave the heart.
Bade Macedonian Archelaos take
The leavings of Athenai, ash once flame.
For fifty politicians' frosty work,
One poet's ash proved ample and to spare:
He propped the state and filled the treasury,
Counselled the king as might a meaner soul,
Furnished the friend with what shall stand in stead
Of crown and sceptre, star his name about
When these are dust; for him, Euripides
Last the old hand on the old phorminx flung,
Clashed thence 'Alkaion,' maddened 'Pentheus' up;
Then music sighed itself away, one moan

Iphigeneia made by Aulis' strand;
With her and music died Euripides.

"The poet-friend who followed him to Thrace,
Agathon, writes thus much: the merchant-ship
Moreover brings a message from the king
To young Euripides, who went on board
This morning at Mounuchia: all is true."

I said "Thank Zeus for the great news and good!"

"Nay, the report is running in brief fire
Through the town's stubbly furrow," he resumed:
— "Entertains brightly what their favorite styles
'The City of Gapers' for a week perhaps,
Supplants three luminous tales, but yesterday
Pronounced sufficient lamps to last the month:
How Glauketes, outbidding Morsimos,
Paid market-price for one Kopaic eel
A thousand drachmai, and then cooked his prize
Not proper conger-fashion but in oil
And nettles, as man fries the foam-fish-kind;
How all the captains of the triremes, late
Victors at Arginousai, on return
Will, for reward, be straightway put to death;
How Mikon wagered a Thessalian mime
Trained him by Lais, looked on as complete,
Against Leogoras' blood-mare koppa-marked,
Valued six talents, — swore, accomplished so,
The girl could swallow at a draught, nor breathe,
A choinix of unmixed Mendesian wine;
And having lost the match will — dine on herbs!
Three stories late a-flame, at once extinct,
Out blazed by just 'Euripides is dead'!

"I met the concourse from the Theatre,
The audience flocking homeward: victory

Again awarded Aristophanes
Precisely for his old play chopped and changed
'The Female Celebrators of the Feast' —
That Thesmophoria, tried a second time.
'Never such full success!' — assured the folk,
Who yet stopped praising to have word of mouth
With 'Euthukles, the bard's own intimate,
Balaustion's husband, the right man to ask.'

"'Dead, yes, but how dead, may acquaintance know?
You were the couple constant at his cave:
Tell us now, is it true that women, moved
By reason of his liking Krateros . . .'

"I answered 'He was loved by Sokrates.'

" 'Nay,' said another, 'envy did the work!
For, emulating poets of the place,
One Arridaios, one Krateues, both
Established in the royal favor, these . . .'

"Protagoras instructed him," said I.

" '*Phu*,' whistled Comic Platon, 'hear the fact!
'T was well said of your friend by Sophokles
"He hate our women? In his verse, belike:
But when it comes to prose-work, — ha, ha, ha!"
New climes don't change old manners: so, it chanced,
Pursuing an intrigue one moonless night
With Arethousian Nikodikos' wife,
(Come now, his years were simply seventy-five)
Crossing the palace-court, what haps he on
But Archelaos' pack of hungry hounds?
Who tore him piecemeal ere his cry brought help.'

"I asked: Did not you write 'The Festivals'?
You best know what dog tore him when alive.

You others, who now make a ring to hear,
Have not you just enjoyed a second treat,
Proclaimed that ne'er was play more worthy prize
Than this, myself assisted at, last year,
And gave its worth to, — spitting on the same?
Appraise no poetry, — price cuttlefish,
Or that seaweed-alphestes, scorpion-sort,
Much famed for mixing mud with fantasy
On midnights! I interpret no foul dreams."

If so said Euthukles, so could not I,
Balaustion, say. After "Lusistraté"
No more for me of "people's privilege,"
No witnessing "the Grand old Comedy
Coeval with our freedom, which, curtailed,
Were freedom's deathblow: relic of the past,
When Virtue laughingly told truth to Vice,
Uncensured, since the stern mouth, stuffed with flowers,
Through poetry breathed satire, perfumed blast
Which sense snuffed up while searched unto the bone!"
I was a stranger: "For first joy," urged friends,
"Go hear our Comedy, some patriot piece
That plies the selfish advocates of war
With argument so unevadable
That crash fall Kleons whom the finer play
Of reason, tickling, deeper wounds no whit
Than would a spear-thrust from a savory-stalk!
No: you hear knave and fool told crime and fault.
And see each scourged his quantity of stripes.
'Rough dealing, awkward language,' whine our fops:
The world 's too squeamish now to bear plain words
Concerning deeds it acts with gust enough:
But, thanks to wine-lees and democracy,

We 've still our stage where truth calls spade a spade!
Ashamed? Phuromachos' decree provides
The sex may sit discreetly, witness all,
Sorted, the good with good, the gay with gay,
Themselves unseen, no need to force a blush.
A Rhodian wife and ignorant so long?
Go hear next play!"
I heard "Lusistratê."
Waves, said to wash pollution from the world,
Take that plague-memory, cure that pustule caught
As, past escape, I sat and saw the piece
By one appalled at Phaidra's fate, — the chaste,
Whom, because chaste, the wicked goddess chained
To that same serpent of unchastity
She loathed most, and who, coiled so, died distraught
Rather than make submission, loose one limb
Love-wards, at lambency of honeyed tongue,
Or torture of the scales which scraped her snow
— I say, the piece by him who charged this piece
(Because Euripides shrank not to teach,
If gods be strong and wicked, man, though weak,
May prove their match by willing to be good)
With infamies the Scythian's whip should cure —
"Such outrage done the public — Phaidra named!
Such purpose to corrupt ingenuous youth,
Such insult cast on female character!" —
Why, when I saw that bestiality —
So beyond all brute-beast imagining,
That when, to point the moral at the close,
Poor Salabaccho, just to show how fair
Was "Reconciliation," stripped her charms,
That exhibition simply bade us breathe,
Seemed something healthy and commendable
After obscenity grotesqued so much
It slunk away revolted at itself.

Henceforth I had my answer when our sage
Pattern-proposing seniors pleaded grave
"You fail to fathom here the deep design!
All 's acted in the interest of truth,
Religion, and those manners old and dear
Which made our city great when citizens
Like Aristeides and like Miltiades
Wore each a golden tettix in his hair."
What do they wear now under — Kleophon?

Well, for such reasons, — I am out of breath,
But loathsomeness we needs must hurry past, —
I did not go to see, nor then nor now,
The "Thesmophoriazousai." But, since males
Choose to brave first, blame afterward, nor brand
Without fair taste of what they stigmatize,
Euthukles had not missed the first display,
Original portrait of Euripides
By "Virtue laughingly reproving Vice":
"Virtue," — the author, Aristophanes,
Who mixed an image out of his own depths,
Ticketed as I tell you. Oh, this time
No more pretension to recondite worth!
No joke in aid of Peace, no demagogue
Pun-pelleted from Pnux, no kordax-dance
Overt helped covertly the Ancient Faith!
All now was muck, home-produce, honest man
The author's soul secreted to a play
Which gained the prize that day we heard the death.

I thought "How thoroughly death alters things!
Where is the wrong now, done our dead and great?
How natural seems grandeur in relief,
Cliff-base with frothy spites against its calm!"

Euthukles interposed — he read my thought —

"O'er them, too, in a moment came the change.
The crowd 's enthusiastic, to a man:
Since, rake as such may please the ordure-heap
Because of certain sparkles presumed ore,
At first flash of true lightning overhead,
They look up, nor resume their search too soon.
The insect-scattering sign is evident,
And nowhere winks a fire-fly rival now,
Nor bustles any beetle of the brood
With trundled dung-ball meant to menace heaven.
Contrariwise, the cry is 'Honor him!'
'A statue in the theatre!' wants one;
Another 'Bring the poet's body back,
Bury him in Peiraios: o'er his tomb
Let Alkamenes carve the music-witch,
The songstress-siren, meed of melody:
Thoukudides invent his epitaph!'
To-night the whole town pays its tribute thus,"
Our tribute should not be the same, my friend!
Statue? Within our heart he stood, he stands!
As for the vest outgrown now by the form,
Low flesh that clothed high soul, — a vesture's fate —
Why, let it fade, mix with the elements
There where it, falling, freed Euripides!
But for the soul that 's tutelary now
Till time end, o'er the world to teach and bless —
How better hail its freedom than by first
Singing, we two, its own song back again,
Up to that face from which flowed beauty — face
Now abler to see triumph and take love
Than when it glorified Athenai once?

The sweet and strange Alkestis, which saved me,
Secured me — you, ends nowise, to my mind,
In pardon of Admetos. Hearts are fain

To follow cheerful weary Herakles
Striding away from the huge gratitude,
Club shouldered, lion-fleece round loin and flank,
Bound on the next new labor "height o'er height
Ever surmounting, — destiny's decree!"
Thither He helps us: that 's the story's end;
He smiling said so, when I told him mine —
My great adventure, how Alkestis helped.
Afterward, when the time for parting fell,
He gave me, with two other precious gifts,
This third and best, consummating the grace,
"Herakles," writ by his own hand, each line.

"If it have worth, reward is still to seek.
Somebody, I forget who, gained the prize
And proved arch-poet: time must show!" he smiled:
"Take this, and, when the noise tires out, judge me —
Some day, not slow to dawn, when somebody —
Who? I forget — proves nobody at all!"

Is not that day come? What if you and I
Re-sing the song, inaugurate the fame?
We have not waited to acquaint ourselves
With song and subject; we can prologuize
How, at Eurustheus' bidding, — hate strained hard, —
Herakles had departed, one time more,
On his last labor, worst of all the twelve;
Descended into Haides, thence to drag
The triple-headed hound, which sun should see
Spite of the god whose darkness whelped the Fear.
Down went the hero, "back — how should he come?"
So laughed King Lukos, an old enemy,
Who judged that absence testified defeat
Of the land's loved one, — since he saved the land

And for that service wedded Megara
Daughter of Thebai, realm her child should rule.
Ambition, greed and malice seized their prey,
The Heracleian House, defenceless left,
Father and wife and child, to trample out
Trace of its hearth-fire: since extreme old age
Wakes pity, woman's wrong wins championship,
And child may grow up man and take revenge.
Hence see we that, from out their palace-home
Hunted, for last resource they cluster now
Couched on the cold ground, hapless supplicants
About their courtyard altar, — Household Zeus
It is, the Three in funeral garb beseech,
Delaying death so, till deliverance come —
When did it ever? — from the deep and dark.
And thus breaks silence old Amphitruon's voice. . . .
Say I not true thus far, my Euthukles?
Suddenly, torch-light! knocking at the door,
Loud, quick, "Admittance for the revels' lord!"
Some unintelligible Komos-cry —
*Raw-flesh red, no cap upon his head,*
*Dionusos, Bacchos, Phales, Iacchos,*
*In let him reel with the kid-skin at his heel,*
*Where it buries in the spread of the bushy myrtle-bed!*
(Our Rhodian Jackdaw-song was sense to that!)
Then laughter, outbursts ruder and more rude,
Through which, with silver point, a fluting pierced,
And ever "Open, open Bacchos bids!"

But at last — one authoritative word,
One name of an immense significance:
For Euthukles rose up, threw wide the door.

There trooped the Choros of the Comedy
Crowned and triumphant; first, those flushed Fifteen

Men that wore women's garb, grotesque disguise.
Then marched the Three,—who played Mnesilochos,
Who, Toxotes, and who, robed right, masked rare,
Monkeyed our Great and Dead to heart's content
That morning in Athenai. Masks were down
And robes doffed now; the sole disguise was drink.

Mixing with these — I know not what gay crowd,
Girl-dancers, flute-boys, and pre-eminent
Among them, — doubtless draped with such reserve
As stopped fear of the fifty-drachma fine
(Beside one's name on public fig-tree nailed)
Which women pay who in the streets walk bare, —
Behold Elaphion of the Persic dance!
Who lately had frisked fawn-foot, and the rest,
— All for the Patriot Cause, the Antique Faith,
The Conservation of True Poesy —
Could I but penetrate the deep design!
Elaphion, more Peiraios-known as "Phaps,"
Tripped at the head of the whole banquet-band
Who came in front now, as the first fell back;
And foremost — the authoritative voice,
The revels-leader, he who gained the prize,
And got the glory of the Archon's feast —
There stood in person Aristophanes.

And no ignoble presence! On the bulge
Of the clear baldness, — all his head one brow, —
True, the veins swelled, blue network, and there surged
A red from cheek to temple, — then retired
As if the dark-leaved chaplet damped a flame, —
Was never nursed by temperance or health.
But huge the eyeballs rolled back native fire,
Imperiously triumphant: nostrils wide

Waited their incense; while the pursed mouth's pout
Aggressive, while the beak supreme above,
While the head, face, nay, pillared throat thrown back,
Beard whitening under like a vinous foam,
These made a glory, of such insolence —
I thought, — such domineering deity
Hephaistos might have carved to cut the brine
For his gay brother's prow, imbrue that path
Which, purpling, recognized the conqueror.
Impudent and majestic: drunk, perhaps,
But that 's religion; sense too plainly snuffed:
Still, sensuality was grown a rite.

What I had disbelieved most proved most true.
There was a mind here, mind a-wantoning
At ease of undisputed mastery
Over the body's brood, those appetites.
Oh but he grasped them grandly, as the god
His either struggling handful, — hurtless snakes
Held deep down, strained hard off from side and side
Mastery his, their simply servitude,
So well could firm fist help intrepid eye.
Fawning and fulsome, had they licked and hissed?
At mandate of one muscle, order reigned.
They had been wreathing much familiar now
About him on his entry; but a squeeze
Choked down the pests to place: their lord stood free.

Forward he stepped: I rose and fronted him.

"Hail, house, the friendly to Euripides!"
(So he began) "Hail, each inhabitant!
You, lady? What, the Rhodian? Form and face,
Victory's self upsoaring to receive

The poet? Right they named you . . . some rich
name,
Vowel-buds thorned about with consonants,
Fragrant, felicitous, rose-glow enriched
By the Isle's unguent: some diminished end
In *ion*, Kallistion? delicater still,
Kubelion or Melittion, — or, suppose
(Less vulgar love than bee or violet)
Phibalion, for the mouth split red-fig-wise,
Korakinidion for the coal-black hair,
Nettarion, Phabion for the darlingness?
But no, it was some fruit-flower, Rhoidion . . . ha,
We near the balsam-bloom — Balaustion! Thanks,
Rhodes! Folk have called me Rhodian, do you
know?
Not fools so far! Because, if Helios wived,
As Pindaros sings somewhere prettily,
Here blooms his offspring, earth-flesh with sun-fire.
Rhodes' blood and Helios' gold. My phorminx, boy!
Why does the boy hang back and balk an ode
Tiptoe at spread of wing? But like enough,
Sunshine frays torchlight. Witness whom you scare,
Superb Balaustion! Look outside the house!
*Pho*, you have quenched my Komos by first frown
Struck dead all joyance: not a fluting puffs
From idle cheekband! Ah, my Choros too?
You 've eaten cuckoo-apple? Dumb, you dogs?
So much good Thasian wasted on your throat
And out of them not one *Threttanelo?*
*Neblaretai!* Because this earth-and-sun
Product looks wormwood and all bitter herbs?
Well, do I blench, though me she hates the most
Of mortals? By the cabbage, off they slink!
You, too, my Chrusomelolonthion-Phaps,
Girl-goldling-beetle-beauty? You, abashed,

Who late, supremely unabashable,
Propped up my play at that important point
When Artamouxia tricks the Toxotes?
Ha, ha, — thank Hermes for the lucky throw, —
We came last comedy of the whole seven,
So went all fresh to judgment well-disposed
For who should fatly feast them, eye and ear,
We two between us! What, you fail your friend?
Away then, free me of your cowardice!
Go, get you the goat's breakfast! Fare afield,
Ye circumcised of Egypt, pigs to sow,
Back to the Priest's or forward to the crows,
So you but rid me of such company!
Once left alone, I can protect myself
From statuesque Balaustion pedestalled
On much disapprobation and mistake!
She dares not beat the sacred brow, beside!
Bacchos' equipment, ivy safeguards well
As Phoibos' bay.

"They take me at my word!
One comfort is, I shall not want them long,
The Archon's cry creaks, creaks, 'Curtail expense!'
The war wants money, year the twenty-sixth!
Cut down our Choros number, clip costume,
Save birds' wings, beetles' armor, spend the cash
In three-crest skull-caps, three days' salt-fish-slice,
Three-banked-ships for these sham-ambassadors,
And what not: any cost but Comedy's!
'No Choros' — soon will follow; what care I?
Archinos and Agurrhios, scrape your flint,
Flay your dead dog, and curry favor so!
Choros in rags, with loss of leather next,
We lose the boys' vote, lose the song and dance,
Lose my Elaphion! Still, the actor stays.

Save but my acting, and the baldhead bard
Kudathenaian and Pandionid,
Son of Philippos, Aristophanes
Surmounts his rivals now as heretofore,
Though stinted to mere sober prosy verse —
'Manners and men,' so squeamish gets the world!
No more 'Step forward, strip for anapæsts!'
No calling naughty people by their names,
No tickling audience into gratitude
With chickpease, barleygroats and nuts and plums,
No settling Salabaccho . . ."

As I turned —

"True, lady, I am tolerably drunk:
The proper inspiration! Otherwise, —
Phrunichos, Choirilos! — had Aischulos
So foiled you at the goat-song? Drink 's a god.
How else did that old doating driveller
Kratinos foil me, match my masterpiece
The 'Clouds'? I swallowed cloud-distilment — dew
Undimmed by any grape-blush, knit my brow
And gnawed my style and laughed my learnedest;
While he worked at his 'Willow-wicker-flask,'
Swigging at that same flask by which he swore,
Till, sing and empty, sing and fill again,
Somehow result was — what it should not be
Next time, I promised him and kept my word!
Hence, brimful now of Thasian . . . I 'll be bound,
Mendesian, merely: triumph-night, you know,
The High Priest entertains the conqueror,
And, since war worsens all things, stingily
The rascal starves whom he is bound to stuff,
Choros and actors and their lord and king
The poet; supper, still he needs must spread —
And this time all was conscientious fare:

He knew his man, his match, his master — made
Amends, spared neither fish, flesh, fowl nor wine:
So merriment increased, I promise you,
Till — something happened."

Here he strangely paused.

"After that, — well, it either was the cup
To the Good Genius, our concluding pledge,
That wrought me mischief, decently unmixed, —
Or, what if, when *that* happened, need arose
Of new libation? Did you only know
What happened! Little wonder I am drunk."

Euthukles, o'er the boat-side, quick, what change,
Watch, in the water! But a second since,
It laughed a ripply spread of sun and sea,
Ray fused with wave, to never disunite.
Now, sudden all the surface, hard and black,
Lies a quenched light, dead motion: what the cause?
Look up and lo, the menace of a cloud
Has solemnized the sparkling, spoiled the sport!
Just so, some overshadow, some new care
Stopped all the mirth and mocking on his face
And left there only such a dark surmise
— No wonder if the revel disappeared,
So did his face shed silence every side!
I recognized a new man fronting me.

"So!" he smiled, piercing to my thought at once,
"You see myself? Balaustion's fixed regard
Can strip the proper Aristophanes
Of what our sophists, in their jargon, style
His accidents? My soul sped forth but now
To meet your hostile survey, — soul unseen,
Yet veritably cinct for soul-defence

With satyr sportive quips, cranks, boss and spike,
Just as my visible body paced the street,
Environed by a boon companionship
Your apparition also puts to flight.
Well, what care I if, unaccoutred twice,
I front my foe — no comicality
Round soul, and body-guard in banishment?
Thank your eyes' searching, undisguised I stand:
The merest female child may question me.
Spare not, speak bold, Balaustion!"

I did speak:

"Bold speech be — welcome to this honored hearth,
Good Genius! Glory of the poet, glow
O' the humorist who castigates his kind,
Suave summer-lightning lambency which plays
On stag-horned tree, misshapen crag askew,
Then vanishes with unvindictive smile
After a moment's laying black earth bare.
Splendor of wit that springs a thunderball —
Satire — to burn and purify the world,
True aim, fair purpose: just wit justly strikes
Injustice, — right, as rightly quells the wrong,
Finds out in knaves', fools', cowards' armory
The tricky tinselled place fire flashes through,
No damage else, sagacious of true ore;
Wit, learned in the laurel, leaves each wreath
O'er lyric shell or tragic barbiton, —
Though alien gauds be singed, — undesecrate,
The genuine solace of the sacred brow.
Ay, and how pulses flame a patriot-star
Steadfast athwart our country's night of things,
To beacon, would she trust no meteor-blaze,
Athenai from the rock she steers for straight!
O light, light, light, I hail light everywhere,

No matter for the murk that was, — perchance,
That will be, — certes, never should have been
Such orb's associate!

"Aristophanes!
'The merest female child may question you?'
Once, in my Rhodes, a portent of the wave
Appalled our coast: for many a darkened day,
Intolerable mystery and fear.
Who snatched a furtive glance through crannied peak,
Could but report of snake-scale, lizard-limb, —
So swam what, making whirlpools as it went,
Madded the brine with wrath or monstrous sport.
''T is Tuphon, loose, unmanacled from mount,'
Declared the priests, 'no way appeasable
Unless perchance by virgin-sacrifice!'
Thus grew the terror and o'erhung the doom —
Until one eve a certain female-child
Strayed in safe ignorance to seacoast edge,
And there sat down and sang to please herself.
When all at once, large-looming from his wave,
Out leaned, chin hand-propped, pensive on the ledge
A sea-worn face, sad as mortality,
Divine with yearning after fellowship.
He rose but breast-high. So much god she saw;
So much she sees now, and does reverence!"

Ah, but there followed tail-splash, frisk of fin!
Let cloud pass, the sea's ready laugh outbreaks.
No very godlike trace retained the mouth
Which mocked with —

"So, He taught you tragedy!
I always asked 'Why may not women act?'
Nay, wear the comic visor just as well;

Or, better, quite cast off the face-disguise
And voice-distortion, simply look and speak,
Real women playing women as men — men!
I shall not wonder if things come to that,
Some day when I am distant far enough.
Do you conceive the quite new Comedy
When laws allow? laws only let girls dance,
Pipe, posture, — above all, Elaphionize,
Provided they keep decent — that is, dumb.
Ay, and, conceiving, I would execute,
Had I but two lives: one were overworked!
How penetrate encrusted prejudice,
Pierce ignorance three generations thick
Since first Sousarion crossed our boundary?
He battered with a big Megaric stone;
Chionides felled oak and rough-hewed thence
This club I wield now, having spent my life
In planing knobs and sticking studs to shine;
Somebody else must try mere polished steel!"

Emboldened by the sober mood's return,
"Meanwhile," said I, "since planed and studded club
Once more has pashed competitors to dust,
And poet proves triumphant with that play
Euthukles found last year unfortunate, —
Does triumph spring from smoothness still more smoothed,
Fresh studs sown thick and threefold? In plain words,
Have you exchanged brute-blows, — which teach the brute
Man may surpass him in brutality, —
For human fighting, or true god-like force
Which breathes persuasion nor needs fight at all?

Have you essayed attacking ignorance,
Convicting folly, by their opposites,
Knowledge and wisdom? not by yours for ours,
Fresh ignorance and folly, new for old,
Greater for less, your crime for our mistake!
If so success at last have crowned desert,
Bringing surprise (dashed haply by concern
At your discovery such wild waste of strength
— And what strength! — went so long to keep in vogue
Such warfare — and what warfare! — shamed so fast,
So soon made obsolete, as fell their foe
By the first arrow native to the orb,
First onslaught worthy Aristophanes) —
Was this conviction's entry that same strange
'Something that happened' to confound your feast?"

"Ah, did he witness then my play that failed,
First 'Thesmophoriazousai'? Well and good!
But did he also see, — your Euthukles, —
My 'Grasshoppers' which followed and failed too,
Three months since, at the 'Little-in-the-Fields'?"

"To say that he did see that First — should say
He never cared to see its following."

"There happens to be reason why I wrote
First play and second also. Ask the cause!
I warrant you receive ere talk be done,
Fit answer, authorizing either act.
But here 's the point: as Euthukles made vow
Never again to taste my quality,
So I was minded next experiment
Should tickle palate — yea, of Euthukles!
Not by such utter change, such absolute

A topsyturvy of stage-habitude
As you and he want, — Comedy built fresh,
By novel brick and mortar, base to roof, —
No, for I stand too near and look too close!
Pleasure and pastime yours, spectators brave,
Should I turn art's fixed fabric upside down!
Little you guess how such tough work tasks soul!
Not over tasks, though: give fit strength fair play,
And strength 's a demiourgos! Art renewed?
Ay, in some closet where strength shuts out — first
The friendly faces, sympathetic cheer:
'More of the old provision none supplies
So bounteously as thou, — our love, our pride,
Our author of the many a perfect piece!
Stick to that standard, change were decadence!'
Next, the unfriendly: 'This time, strain will tire,
He 's fresh, Ameipsias thy antagonist!'
— Or better, in some Salaminian cave
Where sky and sea and solitude make earth
And man and noise one insignificance,
Let strength propose itself, — behind the world, —
Sole prize worth winning, work that satisfies
Strength it has dared and done strength's uttermost!
After which, — clap-to closet and quit cave, —
Strength may conclude in Archelaos' court,
And yet esteem the silken company
So much sky-scud, sea-froth, earth-thistledown,
For aught their praise or blame should joy or grieve.
Strength amid crowds as late in solitude
May lead the still life, ply the wordless task:
Then only, when seems need to move or speak,
Moving — for due respect, when statesmen pass,
(Strength, in the closet, watched how spiders spin)
Speaking — when fashion shows intelligence,
(Strength, in the cave, oft whistled to the gulls)

In short, has learnt first, practised afterwards!
Despise the world and reverence yourself, —
Why, you may unmake things and remake things,
And throw behind you, unconcerned enough,
What 's made or marred: 'you teach men, are not taught!'
So marches off the stage Euripides!

"No such thin fare feeds flesh and blood like mine,
No such faint fume of fancy sates my soul,
No such seclusion, closet, cave or court,
Suits either: give me Iostephanos
Worth making happy what coarse way she will —
O happy-maker, when her cries increase
About the favorite! 'Aristophanes!
More grist to mill, here 's Kleophon to grind!
He 's for refusing peace, though Sparté cede
Even Dekeleia! Here 's Kleonumos
Declaring — though he threw away his shield,
He 'll thrash you till you lay your lyre aside!
Orestes bids mind where you walk of nights —
He wants your cloak as you his cudgelling:
Here 's, finally, Melanthios fat with fish,
The gormandizer-spendthrift-dramatist!
So, bustle! Pounce on opportunity!
Let fun a-screaming in Parabasis,
Find food for folk agape at either end,
Mad for amusement! Times grow better too,
And should they worsen, why, who laughs, forgets.
In no case, venture boy-experiments!
Old wine 's the wine: new poetry drinks raw:
Two plays a season is your pledge, beside;
So, give us "Wasps" again, grown hornets now!' "

Then he changed.

"Do you so detect in me —
Brow-bald, chin-bearded, me, curbed cheek, carved lip,
Or where soul sits and reigns in either eye —
What suits the — stigma, I say, — style say you,
Of 'Wine-lees-poet'? Bravest of buffoons,
Less blunt than Telekleides, less obscene
Than Murtilos, Hermippos: quite a match
In elegance for Eupolis himself,
Yet pungent as Kratinos at his best?
Graced with traditional immunity
Ever since, much about my grandsire's time,
Some funny village-man in Megara,
Lout-lord and clown-king, used a privilege,
As due religious drinking-bouts came round,
To daub his phiz, — no, that was afterward, —
He merely mounted cart with mates of choice
And traversed country, taking house by house,
At night, — because of danger in the freak, —
Then hollaed 'Skin-flint starves his laborers!
Clench-fist stows figs away, cheats government!
Such an one likes to kiss his neighbors's wife,
And beat his own; while such another . . . Boh!'
Soon came the broad day, circumstantial tale,
Dancing and verse, and there 's our Comedy,
There 's Mullos, there 's Euetes, there 's the stock
I shall be proud to graft my powers upon!
Protected? Punished quite as certainly
When Archons pleased to lay down each his law, —
Your Morucheides-Surakosios sort, —
Each season, 'No more naming citizens,
Only abuse the vice, the vicious spare!
Observe, henceforth no Areopagite
Demean his rank by writing Comedy!'
(They one and all could write the 'Clouds' of course.)

'Needs must we nick expenditure, allow
Comedy half a choros, supper — none,
Times being hard, while applicants increase
For, what costs cash, the Tragic Trilogy.'
Lofty Tragedians! How they lounge aloof
Each with his Triad, three plays to my one,
Not counting the contemptuous fourth, the frank
Concession to mere moral levity,
Satyric pittance tossed our beggar-world!
Your proud Euripides from first to last
Doled out some five such, never deigned us more!
And these — what curds and whey for marrowy wine!
That same Alkestis you so rave about
Passed muster with him for a Satyr-play,
The prig! — why trifle time with toys and skirts
When he could stuff four ragbags sausage-wise
With sophistry, with bookish odds and ends,
Sokrates, meteors, moonshine, 'Life 's not Life,'
'The tongue swore, but unsworn the mind remains,'
And fifty such concoctions, crab-tree-fruit
Digested while, head low and heels in heaven,
He lay, let Comics laugh — for privilege!
Looked puzzled on, or pityingly off,
But never dreamed of paying gibe by jeer,
Buffet by blow: plenty of proverb-pokes
At vice and folly, wicked kings, mad mobs!
No sign of wincing at my Comic lash,
No protest against infamous abuse,
Malignant censure, — naught to prove I scourged
With tougher thong than leek-and-onion-plait!
If ever he glanced gloom, aggrieved at all,
The aggriever must be — Aischulos perhaps:
Or Sophokles he 'd take exception to.
— Do you detect in me — in me, I ask,

The man like to accept this measurement
Of faculty, contentedly sit classed
Mere Comic Poet — since I wrote 'The Birds'?"

I thought there might lurk truth in jest's disguise.
"Thanks!" he resumed, so quick to construe smile!
"I answered — in my mind — these gapers thus:
Since old wine 's ripe and new verse raw, you judge—
What if I vary vintage-mode and mix
Blossom with must, give nosegay to the brew,
Fining, refining, gently, surely, till
The educated taste turns unawares
From customary dregs to draught divine?
Then answered — with my lips: More 'Wasps' you want?
Come next year and I give you 'Grasshoppers'!
And 'Grasshoppers' I gave them, — last month's play.
They formed the Choros. Alkibiades,
No longer Triphales but Trilophos,
(Whom I called Darling-of-the-Summertime,
Born to be nothing else but beautiful
And brave, to eat, drink, love his life away)
Persuades the Tettix (our Autochthon-brood,
That sip the dew and sing on olive-branch
Above the ant-and-emmet populace)
To summon all who meadow, hill and dale
Inhabit — bee, wasp, woodlouse, dragonfly —
To band themselves against red nippernose
Stagbeetle, huge Taügetan (you guess —
Sparté) Athenai needs must battle with,
Because her sons are grown effeminate
To that degree — so morbifies their flesh
The poison-drama of Euripides,
Morals and music — there 's no antidote

Occurs save warfare which inspirits blood,
And brings us back perchance the blessed time
When (Choros takes up tale) our commonalty
Firm in primæval virtue, antique faith,
Ere earwig-sophist plagued or pismire-sage,
Cockered no noddle up with A, b, g,
Book-learning, logic-chopping, and the moon,
But just employed their brains on '*Ruppapai*,
Row, boys, munch barley-bread, and take your ease —
Mindful, however, of the tier beneath!'
Ah, golden epoch! while the nobler sort
(Such needs must study, no contesting that!)
Wore no long curls but used to crop their hair,
Gathered the tunic well about the ham,
Remembering 't was soft sand they used for seat
At school-time, while — mark this — the lesson long,
No learner ever dared to cross his legs!
Then, if you bade him take the myrtle-bough
And sing for supper — 't was some grave romaunt
*How man of Mitulené, wondrous wise,*
*Jumped into hedge, by mortals quickset called,*
*And there, anticipating Oidipous,*
*Scratched out his eyes and scratched them in again.*
None of your Phaidras, Augés, Kanakés,
To mincing music, turn, trill, tweedle-trash,
Whence comes that Marathon is obsolete!
Next, my Antistrophé was — praise of Peace:
Ah, could our people know what Peace implies!
Home to the farm and furrow! Grub one's vine,
Romp with one's Thratta, pretty serving-girl,
When wifie 's busy bathing! Eat and drink,
And drink and eat, what else is good in life?
Slice hare, toss pancake, gayly gurgle down

The Thasian grape in celebration due
Of Bacchos! Welcome, dear domestic rite,
When wife and sons and daughters, Thratta too,
Pour peasoup as we chant delectably
*In Bacchos reels, his tunic at his heels!*
Enough, you comprehend, — I do at least!
Then, — be but patient, — the Parabasis!
Pray! For in that I also pushed reform.
None of the self-laudation, vulgar brag,
Vainglorious rivals cultivate so much!
No! If some merest word in Art's defence
Justice demanded of me, — never fear!
Claim was preferred, but dignifiedly.
A cricket asked a locust (winged, you know)
What he had seen most rare in foreign parts?
'I have flown far,' chirped he, 'North, East, South, West,
And nowhere heard of poet worth a fig
If matched with Bald-head here, Aigina's boast,
Who in this play bids rivalry despair
Past, present, and to come, so marvellous
His Tragic, Comic, Lyric excellence!
Whereof the fit reward were (not to speak
Of dinner every day at public cost
I' the Prutaneion) supper with yourselves,
My Public, best dish offered bravest bard!'
No more! no sort of sin against good taste!
Then, satire, — Oh, a plain necessity!
But I won't tell you: for — could I dispense
With one more gird at old Ariphrades?
How scorpion-like he feeds on human flesh —
Ever finds out some novel infamy
Unutterable, inconceivable,
Which all the greater need was to describe
Minutely, each tail-twist at ink-shed time . . .

Now, what 's your gesture caused by? What you loathe,
Don't I loathe doubly, else why take such pains
To tell it you? But keep your prejudice!
My audience justified you! Housebreakers!
This pattern-purity was played and failed
Last Rural Dionusia — failed! for why?
Ameipsias followed with the genuine stuff.
He had been mindful to engage the Four —
Karkinos and his dwarf-crab-family —
Father and sons, they whirled like spinning-tops,
Choros gigantically poked his fun,
The boy's frank laugh relaxed the senior's brow,
The skies re-echoed victory's acclaim,
Ameipsias gained his due, I got my dose
Of wisdom for the future. Purity?
No more of that next month, Athenai mine!
Contrive new cut of robe who will, — I patch
The old exomis, add no purple sleeve!
The Thesmophoriazousai, smartened up
With certain plaits, shall please, I promise you!

"Yes, I took up the play that failed last year,
And re-arranged things; threw adroitly in, —
No Parachoregema, — men to match
My women there already; and when these
(I had a hit at Aristullos here,
His plan how womankind should rule the roast)
Drove men to plough — 'A-field, ye cribbed of cape!'
Men showed themselves exempt from service straight
Stupendously, till all the boys cried 'Brave!'
Then for the elders, I bethought me too,
Improved upon Mnesilochos' release
From the old bowman, board and binding-strap:
I made his son-in-law Euripides

Engage to put both shrewish wives away —
'Gravity' one, the other 'Sophist-lore' —
And mate with the Bald Bard's hetairai twain —
'Goodhumor' and 'Indulgence': on they tripped
Murrhiné, Akalanthis, — 'beautiful
Their whole belongings'— crowd joined choros there!
And while the Toxotes wound up his part
By shower of nuts and sweetmeats on the mob,
The woman-choros celebrated New
Kalligeneia, the frank last-day rite.
Brief, I was chaired and caressed and crowned
And the whole theatre broke out a-roar,
Echoed my admonition — choros-cap —
*Rivals of mine, your hands to your faces!*
*Summon no more the Muses, the Graces,*
*Since here by my side they have chosen their places!*
And so we all flocked merrily to feast,
I, my choragos, choros, actors, mutes
And flutes aforesaid, friends in crowd, no fear,
At the Priest's supper; and hilarity
Grew none the less that, early in the piece,
Ran a report, from row to row close-packed,
Of messenger's arrival at the Port
With weighty tidings, 'Of Lusandros' flight,'
Opined one; 'That Euboia penitent
Sends the Confederation fifty ships,'
Preferred another; while 'The Great King's Eye
Has brought a present for Elaphion here,
That rarest peacock Kompolakuthes!'
Such was the supposition of a third.
'No matter what the news,' friend Strattis laughed,
'It won't be worse for waiting: while each click
Of the klepsudra sets a-shaking grave
Resentment in our shark's-head, boiled and spoiled
By this time: dished in Sphettian vinegar,

Silphion and honey, served with cocks'-brain-sauce!
So, swift to supper, Poet! No mistake,
This play; nor, like the unflavored "Grasshoppers,"
Salt without thyme!' Right merrily we supped,
Till — something happened.

"Out it shall, at last!

"Mirth drew to ending, for the cup was crowned
To the Triumphant! 'Kleonclapper erst,
Now, Plier of a scourge Euripides
Fairly turns tail from, flying Attiké
For Makedonia's rocks and frosts and bears,
Where, furry grown, he growls to match the squeak
Of girl-voiced, crocus-vested Agathon!
Ha ha, he he!' When suddenly a knock —
Sharp, solitary, cold, authoritative.

"'*Babaiax!* Sokrates a-passing by,
A-peering in for Aristullos' sake,
To put a question touching Comic Law?'

"No! Enters an old pale-swathed majesty,
Makes slow mute passage through two ranks as mute,
(Strattis stood up with all the rest, the sneak!)
Gray brow still bent on ground, upraised at length
When, our Priest reached, full-front the vision paused.

"'Priest!' — the deep tone succeeded the fixed gaze —
'Thou carest that thy god have spectacle
Decent and seemly; wherefore I announce
That, since Euripides is dead to-day,

My Choros, at the Greater Feast, next month,
Shall, clothed in black, appear ungarlanded!'

"Then the gray brow sank low, and Sophokles
Re-swathed him, sweeping doorward: mutely passed
'Twixt rows as mute, to mingle possibly
With certain gods who convoy age to port;
And night resumed him.

"When our stupor broke,
Chirpings took courage, and grew audible.

"'Dead — so one speaks now of Euripides!
Ungarlanded dance Choros, did he say?
I guess the reason: in extreme old age
No doubt such have the gods for visitants.
Why did he dedicate to Herakles
An altar else, but that the god, turned Judge,
Told him in dream who took the crown of gold?
He who restored Akropolis the theft,
Himself may feel perhaps a timely twinge
At thought of certain other crowns he filched
From — who now visits Herakles the Judge.
Instance "Medeia"! that play yielded palm
To Sophokles; and he again — to whom?
Euphorion! Why? Ask Herakles the Judge!'

"'Ungarlanded, just means — economy!
Suppress robes, chaplets, everything suppress
Except the poet's present! An old tale
Put capitally by Trugaios — eh?
— News from the world of transformation strange!
How Sophokles is grown Simonides,
And, — aged, rotten, — all the same, for greed
Would venture on a hurdle out to sea! —

So jokes Philonides. Kallistratos
Retorts — Mistake! Instead of stinginess,
The fact is, in extreme decrepitude,
He has discarded poet and turned priest,
Priest of Half-Hero Alkon: visited
In his own house too by Asklepios' self,
So he avers. Meanwhile, his own estate
Lies fallow; Iophon 's the manager, —
Nay, touches up a play, brings out the same,
Asserts true sonship. See to what you sink
After your dozen-dozen prodigies!
Looking so old — Euripides seems young,
Born ten years later.'

" 'Just his tricky style!
Since, stealing first away, he wins first word
Out of good-natured rival Sophokles,
Procures himself no bad panegyric.
Had fate willed otherwise, himself were taxed
To pay survivor's-tribute, — harder squeezed
From anybody beaten first to last,
Than one who, steadily a conqueror,
Finds that his magnanimity is tasked
To merely make pretence and — beat itself!'

"So chirped the feasters though suppressedly,

"But I — what else do you suppose? — had pierced
Quite through friends' outside-straining, foes' mock-praise,
And reached conviction hearted under all.
Death's rapid line had closed a life's account
And cut off, left unalterably clear
The summed-up value of Euripides.

"Well, it might be the Thasian! Certainly
There sang suggestive music in my ears;

And, through — what sophists style — the wall of sense
My eyes pierced: death seemed life and life seemed death,
Envisaged that way, now, which I, before,
Conceived was just a moonstruck mood. Quite plain
There re-insisted, — ay, each prim stiff phrase
Of each old play, my still-new laughing-stock,
Had meaning, well worth poet's pains to state,
Should life prove half true life's term, — death, the rest.
As for the other question, late so large
Now all at once so little, — he or I,
Which better comprehended playwright craft, —
There, too, old admonition took fresh point.
As clear recurred our last word-interchange
Two years since, when I tried with 'Ploutos.' 'Vain!'
Saluted me the cold grave-bearded bard —
'Vain, this late trial, Aristophanes!
None balks the genius with impunity!
You know what kind 's the nobler, what makes grave
Or what makes grin; there 's yet a nobler still,
Possibly, — what makes wise, not grave, — and glad,
Not grinning: whereby laughter joins with tears,
Tragic and Comic Poet prove one power,
And Aristophanes becomes our Fourth —
Nay, greatest! Never needs the Art stand still,
But those Art leans on lag, and none like you,
Her strongest of supports, whose step aside
Undoes the march: defection checks advance
Too late adventured! See the "Ploutos" here!
This step decides your foot from old to new —
Proves you relinquish song and dance and jest,

Discard the beast, and, rising from all-fours,
Fain would paint, manlike, actual human life,
Make veritable men think, say and do.
Here 's the conception: which to execute,
Where 's force? Spent! Ere the race began, was breath
O' the runner squandered on each friendly fool —
Wit-fireworks fizzed off while day craved no flame:
How should the night receive her due of fire
Flared out in Wasps and Horses, Clouds and Birds,
Prodigiously a-crackle? Rest content!
The new adventure for the novel man
Born to that next success myself foresee
In right of where I reach before I rest.
At end of a long course, straight all the way,
Well may there tremble somewhat into ken
The untrod path, clouds veiled from earlier gaze!
None may live two lives: I have lived mine through,
Die where I first stand still. You retrograde.
I leave my life's work. *I* compete with you,
My last with your last, my Antiope —
Phoinissai — with this Ploutos? No, I think!
Ever shall great and awful Victory
Accompany my life — in Maketis
If not Athenai. Take my farewell, friend!
Friend, — for from no consummate excellence
Like yours, whatever fault may countervail,
Do I profess estrangement: murk the marsh,
Yet where a solitary marble block
Blanches the gloom, there let the eagle perch!
You show — what splinters of Pentelikos,
Islanded by what ordure! Eagles fly,
Rest on the right place, thence depart as free;
But 'ware man's footstep, would it traverse mire
Untainted! Mire is safe for worms that crawl.'

"Balaustion! Here are very many words,
All to portray one moment's rush of thought, —
And much they do it! Still, you understand.
The Archon, the Feast-master, read their sum
And substance, judged the banquet-glow extinct,
So rose, discreetly if abruptly, crowned
The parting cup, — 'To the Good Genius, then!'

"Up starts young Strattis for a final flash:
'Ay the Good Genius! To the Comic Muse,
She who evolves superiority,
Triumph and joy from sorrow, unsuccess
And all that 's incomplete in human life;
Who proves such actual failure transient wrong,
Since out of body uncouth, halt and maimed —
Since out of soul grotesque, corrupt or blank —
Fancy, uplifted by the Muse, can flit
To soul and body, re-instate them Man:
Beside which perfect man, how clear we see
Divergency from type was earth's effect!
Escaping whence by laughter, — Fancy's feat, —
We right man's wrong, establish true for false, —
Above misshapen body, uncouth soul,
Reach the fine form, the clear intelligence —
Above unseemliness, reach decent law, —
By laughter: attestation of the Muse
That low-and-ugsome is not signed and sealed
Incontrovertibly man's portion here,
Or, if here, — why, still high-and-fair exists
In that ethereal realm where laughs out soul
Lift by the Muse. Hail thou her ministrant!
Hail who accepted no deformity
In man as normal and remediless,
But rather pushed it to such gross extreme
That, outraged, we protest by eye's recoil

The opposite proves somewhere rule and law!
Hail who implied, by limning Lamachos,
Plenty and pastime wait on peace, not war!
Philokloen — better bear a wrong than plead,
Play the litigious fool to stuff the mouth
Of dikast with the due three-obol fee!
The Paphlagonian — stick to the old sway
Of few and wise, not rabble-government!
Trugaios, Pisthetairos, Strepsiades, —
Why multiply examples? Hail, in fine,
The hero of each painted monster — so
Suggesting the unpictured perfect shape!
Pour out! A laugh to Aristophanes!'

"Stay, my fine Strattis" — and I stopped applause —
" 'To the Good Genius — but the Tragic Muse!
She who instructs her poet, bids man's soul
Play man's part merely nor attempt the gods'
Ill-guessed of! Task humanity to height,
Put passion to prime use, urge will, unshamed
When will's last effort breaks in impotence!
No power forego, elude: no weakness, — plied
Fairly by power and will, — renounce, deny!
Acknowledge, in such miscalled weakness strength
Latent: and substitute thus things for words!
Make man run life's race fairly, — legs and feet,
Craving no false wings to o'erfly its length!
Trust on, trust ever, trust to end — in truth!
By truth of extreme passion, utmost will,
Shame back all false display of either force —
Barrier about such strenuous heat and glow,
That cowardice shall shirk contending, — cant,
Pretension, shrivel at truth's first approach!
Pour to the Tragic Muse's ministrant
Who, as he pictured pure Hippolutos,

Abolished our earth's blot Ariphrades;
Who, as he drew Bellerophon the bold,
Proclaimed Kleonumos incredible;
Who, as his Theseus towered up man once more,
Made Alkibiades shrink boy again!
A tear — no woman's tribute, weak exchange
For action, water spent and heart's-blood saved —
No man's regret for greatness gone, ungraced
Perchance by even that poor meed, man's praise —
But some god's superabundance of desire,
Yearning of will to 'scape necessity, —
Love's overbrimming for self-sacrifice,
Whence good might be, which never else may be,
By power displayed, forbidden this strait sphere, —
Effort expressible one only way —
Such tear from me fall to Euripides!' "

The Thasian! — All, the Thasian, I account!
Whereupon outburst the whole company
Into applause and — laughter, would you think?

"The unrivalled one! How, never at a loss,
He turns the Tragic on its Comic side
Else imperceptible! Here 's death itself —
Death of a rival, of an enemy, —
Scarce seen as Comic till the master-touch
Made it acknowledge Aristophanes!
Lo, that Euripidean laurel-tree
Struck to the heart by lightning! Sokrates
Would question us, with buzz of how and why,
Wherefore the berry's virtue, the bloom's vice,
Till we all wished him quiet with his friend;
Agathon would compose an elegy,
Lyric bewailment fit to move a stone,
And, stones responsive, we might wince, 't is like;

Nay, with most cause of all to weep the least,
Sophokles ordains mourning for his sake
While we confess to a remorseful twinge: —
Suddenly, who but Aristophanes,
Prompt to the rescue, puts forth solemn hand,
Singles us out the tragic tree's best branch,
Persuades it groundward and, at tip, appends,
For votive-visor, Faun's goat-grinning face!
Back it flies, evermore with jest a-top,
And we recover the true mood, and laugh!"

"I felt as when some Nikias, — ninny-like
Troubled by sunspot-portent, moon-eclipse, —
At fault a little, sees no choice but sound
Retreat from foeman; and his troops mistake
The signal, and hail onset in the blast,
And at their joyous answer, *alalé*,
Back the old courage brings the scattered wits;
He wonders what his doubt meant, quick confirms
The happy error, blows the charge amain.
So I repaired things.

"Both be praised" thanked I.
"You who have laughed with Aristophanes,
You who wept rather with the Lord of Tears!
Priest, do thou, president alike o'er each,
Tragic and Comic function of the god,
Help with libation to the blended twain!
Either of which who serving, only serves —
Proclaims himself disqualified to pour
To that Good Genius — complex Poetry,
Uniting each god-grace, including both:
Which, operant for body as for soul,
Masters alike the laughter and the tears,
Supreme in lowliest earth, sublimest sky.

Who dares disjoin these, — whether he ignores
Body or soul, whichever half destroys, —
Maims the else perfect manhood, perpetrates
Again the inexpiable crime we curse —
Hacks at the Hermai, halves each guardian shape
Combining, nowise vainly, prominence
Of august head and enthroned intellect,
With homelier symbol of asserted sense, —
Nature's prime impulse, earthly appetite.
For, when our folly ventures on the freak,
Would fain abolish joy and fruitfulness,
Mutilate nature — what avails the Head
Left solitarily predominant, —
Unbodied soul, — not Hermes, both in one?
I, no more than our City, acquiesce
In such a desecration, but defend
Man's double nature — ay, wert thou its foe!
Could I once more, thou cold Euripides,
Encounter thee, in naught would I abate
My warfare, nor subdue my worst attack
On thee whose life-work preached 'Raise soul, sink sense!
Evirate Hermes!' — would avenge the god,
And justify myself. Once face to face,
Thou, the argute and tricksy, shouldst not wrap,
As thine old fashion was, in silent scorn
The breast that quickened at the sting of truth,
Nor turn from me, as, if the ta e be true,
From Lais when she met thee in thy walks,
And questioned why she had no rights as thou:
Not so shouldst thou betake thee, be assured
To book and pencil, deign me no reply!
I would extract an answer from those lips
So closed and cold, were mine the garden-chance!
Gone from the world! Does none remain to take

Thy part and ply me with thy sophist-skill?
No sun makes proof of his whole potency
For gold and purple in that orb we view:
The apparent orb does little but leave blind
The audacious, and confused the worshipping;
But, close on orb's departure, must succeed
The serviceable cloud, — must intervene,
Induce expenditure of rose and blue,
Reveal what lay in him was lost to us.
So, friends, what hinders, as we homeward go,
If, privileged by triumph gained to-day,
We clasp that cloud our sun left saturate,
The Rhodian rosy with Euripides?
Not of my audience on my triumph-day,
She nor her husband! After the night's news
Neither will sleep but watch; I know the mood.
Accompany! my crown declares my right!
And here you stand with those warm golden eyes!

"In honest language, I am scarce too sure
Whether I really felt, indeed expressed
Then, in that presence, things I now repeat:
Nor half, nor any one word, — will that do?
May be, such eyes must strike conviction, turn
One's nature bottom upwards, show the base —
The live rock latent under wave and foam:
Superimposure these! Yet solid stuff
Will ever and anon, obeying star,
(And what star reaches rock-nerve like an eye?)
Swim up to surface, spout or mud or flame,
And find no more to do than sink as fast.

"Anyhow, I have followed happily
The impulse, pledged my Genius with effect,
Since, come to see you, I am shown — myself!"

I answered:

"One of us declared for both
'Welcome the glory of Aristophanes.'
The other adds: and, — if that glory last,
Nor marsh-born vapor creep to veil the same, —
Once entered, share in our solemnity!
Commemorate, as we, Euripides!"

"What?" he looked round, "I darken the bright house?
Profane the temple of your deity?
That 's true! Else wherefore does he stand portrayed?
What Rhodian paint and pencil saved so much,
Beard, freckled face, brow — all but breath, I hope!
Come, that 's unfair: myself am somebody,
Yet my pictorial fame 's just potter's-work, —
I merely figure on men's drinking-mugs!
I and the Flat-nose, Sophroniskos' son,
Oft make a pair. But what 's this lies below?
His table-book and graver, playwright's tool!
And lo, the sweet psalterion, strung and screwed,
Whereon he tried those *le-é-é-é-és*
And *ke-é-é-é-és* and turns and trills,
Lovely lark's tirra-lirra, lad's delight!
Aischulos' bronze-throat eagle-bark at blood
Has somehow spoiled my taste for twitterings!
With . . . what, and did he leave you 'Herakles'?
The 'Frenzied Hero,' one unfractured sheet,
No pine-wood tablets smeared with treacherous wax —
Papuros perfect as e'er tempted pen!
This sacred twist of bay-leaves dead and sere
Must be that crown the fine work failed to catch, —

No wonder! This might crown 'Antiope.'
'Herakles' triumph? In your heart perhaps!
But elsewhere? Come now, I 'll explain the case,
Show you the main mistake. Give me the sheet!"

I interrupted:

"Aristophanes!
The stranger-woman sues in her abode —
'Be honored as our guest!' But, call it — shrine,
Then 'No dishonor to the Daimon!' bids
The priestess 'or expect dishonor's due!'
You enter fresh from your worst infamy,
Last instance of long outrage; yet I pause,
Withhold the word a-tremble on my lip,
Incline me, rather, yearn to reverence, —
So you but suffer that I see the blaze
And not the bolt, — the splendid fancy-fling,
Not the cold iron malice, the launched lie
Whence heavenly fire has withered; impotent,
Yet execrable, leave it 'neath the look
Of yon impassive presence! What he scorned,
His life long, need I touch, offend my foot,
To prove that malice missed its mark, that lie
Cumbers the ground, returns to whence it came?
I marvel, I deplore, — the rest be mute!
But, throw off hate's celestiality, —
Show me, apart from song-flash and wit-flame,
A mere man's hand ignobly clenched against
Yon supreme calmness, — and I interpose,
Such as you see me! Silk breaks lightning's blow!"

He seemed to scarce so much as notice me,
Aught had I spoken, save the final phrase:
Arrested there.

"Euripides grown calm!
Calmness supreme means dead and therefore safe,"
He muttered; then more audibly began —

"Dead! Such must die! Could people comprehend!
There 's the unfairness of it! So obtuse
Are all: from Solon downward with his saw
'Let none revile the dead, — no, though the son,
Nay, far descendant, should revile thyself!' —
To him who made Elektra, in the act
Of wreaking vengeance on her worst of foes,
Scruple to blame, since speech that blames insults
Too much the very villain life-released.
Now, *I* say, only after death, begins
That formidable claim, — immunity
Of faultiness from fault's due punishment!
The living, who defame me, — why, they live:
Fools, — I best prove them foolish by their life,
Will they but work on, lay their work by mine,
And wait a little, one Olympiad, say!
Then — where 's the vital force, mine froze beside?
The sturdy fibre, shamed my brittle stuff?
The school-correctness, sure of wise award
When my vagaries cease to tickle taste?
Where 's censure that must sink me, judgment big
Awaiting just the word posterity
Pants to pronounce? Time's wave breaks, buries —
*whom*,
Fools, when myself confronts you four years hence?
But die, ere next Lenaia, — safely so
You 'scape me, slink with all your ignorance,
Stupidity and malice, to that hole
O'er which survivors croak 'Respect the dead!'
Ay, for I needs must! But allow me clutch
Only a carrion-handful, lend it sense,

(Mine, not its own, or could it answer me?)
And question 'You, I pluck from hiding-place,
Whose cant was, certain years ago, my 'Clouds'
Might last until the swallows came with Spring —
Whose chatter, 'Birds' are unintelligible,
Mere psychologic puzzling: poetry?
List, the true lay to rock a cradle with!
*O man of Mitulené, wondrous wise!'*
— Would not I rub each face in its own filth
To tune of 'Now that years have come and gone,
How does the fact stand? What 's demonstrable
By time, that tries things? — your own test, not mine
Who think men are, were, ever will be fools,
Though somehow fools confute fools, — as these, you!
Don't mumble to the sheepish twos and threes
You cornered and called "audience"! Face this *me*
Who know, and can, and — helped by fifty years —
Do pulverize you pygmies, then as now!'

"Ay, now as then, I pulverize the brood,
Balaustion! Mindful, from the first, where foe
Would hide head safe when hand had flung its stone,
I did not turn cheek and take pleasantry,
But flogged while skin could purple and flesh start,
To teach fools whom they tried conclusions with.
First face a-splutter at me got such splotch
Of prompt slab mud as, filling mouth to maw,
Made its concern thenceforward not so much
To criticise me as go cleanse itself.
The only drawback to which huge delight, —
(He saw it, how he saw it, that calm cold
Sagacity you call Euripides!)
— Why, 't is that, make a muckheap of a man,
There, pillared by your prowess, he remains,

Immortally immerded. Not so he!
Men pelted him but got no pellet back.
He reasoned, I 'll engage, — 'Acquaint the world
Certain minuteness butted at my knee?
Dogface Eruxis, the small satirist, —
What better would the manikin desire
Than to strut forth on tiptoe, notable
As who, so far up, fouled me in the flank?'
So dealt he with the dwarfs: we giants, too,
Why must we emulate their pin-point play?
Render imperishable — impotence,
For mud throw mountains? Zeus, by mud unreached, —
Well, 't was no dwarf he heaved Olumpos at!"

My heart burned up within me to my tongue.

"And why must men remember, ages hence,
Who it was rolled down rocks, but refuse too —
Strattis might steal from! mixture monument,
Recording what? 'I, Aristophanes,
Who boast me much inventive in my art,
Against Euripides thus volleyed muck
Because, in art, he too extended bounds.
I — patriot, loving peace and hating war, —
Choosing the rule of few, but wise and good,
Rather than mob-dictature, fools and knaves
However multiplied their mastery, —
Despising most of all the demagogue,
(Noisome air-bubble, buoyed up, borne along
By kindred breath of knave and fool below,
Whose hearts swell proudly as each puffing face
Grows big, reflected in that glassy ball,
Vacuity, just bellied out to break
And righteously bespatter friends the first)

I loathing, — beyond less puissant speech
Than my own god-grand language to declare, —
The fawning, cozenage and calumny
Wherewith such favorite feeds the populace
That fan and set him flying for reward: —
I who, detecting what vice underlies
Thought's superstructure, — fancy's sludge and slime
'Twixt fact's sound floor and thought's mere surface-growth
Of hopes and fears which root no deeplier down
Than where all such mere fungi breed and bloat —
Namely, man's misconception of the God: —
I, loving, hating, wishful from my soul
That truth should triumph, falsehood have defeat,
— Why, all my soul's supremacy of power
Did I pour out in volley just on him
Who, his whole life long, championed every cause
I called my heart's cause, loving as I loved,
Hating my hates, spurned falsehood, championed truth, —
Championed truth not by flagellating foe
With simple rose and lily, gibe and jeer,
Sly wink of boon-companion o'er his bowze
Who, while he blames the liquor, smacks the lip,
Blames, doubtless, but leers condonation too, —
No, the balled fist broke brow like thunderbolt,
Battered till brain flew! Seeing which descent,
None questioned that was first acquaintanceship,
The avenger's with the vice he crashed through bone.
Still, he displeased me; and I turned from foe
To fellow-fighter, flung much stone, more mud, —
But missed him, since he lives aloof, I see.'
Pah! stop more shame, deep-cutting glory through,
Nor add, this poet, learned, — found no taunt

Tell like 'That other poet studies books!'
Wise, — cried 'At each attempt to move our hearts,
He uses the mere phrase of daily life!'
Witty, — 'His mother was a herb-woman!'
Veracious, honest, loyal, fair and good, —
'It was Kephisophon who helped him write!'

"Whence, — O the tragic end of comedy! —
Balaustion pities Aristophanes.
For, who believed him? Those who laughed so loud?
They heard him call the sun Sicilian cheese!
Had he called true cheese — curd, would muscle move?
What made them laugh but the enormous lie?
'Kephisophon wrote Herakles? ha, ha,
What can have stirred the wine-dregs, soured the soul
And set a-lying Aristophanes?
Some accident at which he took offence!
The Tragic Master in a moody muse
Passed him unhailing, and it hurts — it hurts!
Beside, there 's license for the Wine-lees-song!' "

Blood burnt the cheek-bone, each black eye flashed fierce.

"But this exceeds our license! Stay awhile —
That 's the solution! both are foreigners,
The fresh-come Rhodian lady and her spouse
The man of Phokis: newly resident,
Nowise instructed — that explains it all!
No born and bred Athenian but would smile,
Unless frown seemed more fit for ignorance.
These strangers have a privilege!

"You blame"
(Presently he resumed with milder mien)
"Both theory and practice — Comedy:
Blame her from altitudes the Tragic friend
Rose to, and upraised friends along with him,
No matter how. Once there, all 's cold and fine,
Passionless, rational; our world beneath
Shows (should you condescend to grace so much
As glance at poor Athenai) grimly gross —
A population which, mere flesh and blood,
Eats, drinks and kisses, falls to fisticuffs,
Then hugs as hugely: speaks too as it acts,
Prodigiously talks nonsense, — townsmen needs
Must parley in their town's vernacular.
Such world has, of two courses, one to choose:
Unworld itself, — or else go blackening off
To its crow-kindred, leave philosophy
Her heights serene, fit perch for owls like you.
Now, since the world demurs to either course,
Permit me, — in default of boy or girl,
So they be reared Athenian, good and true, —
To praise what you most blame! Hear Art's defence!
I 'll prove our institution, Comedy,
Coëval with the birth of freedom, matched
So nice with our Republic, that its growth
Measures each greatness, just as its decline
Would signalize the downfall of the pair.
Our Art began when Bacchos . . . never mind!
You and your master don't acknowledge gods:
'They are not, no, they are not!' well, — began
When the rude instinct of our race outspoke,
Found, — on recurrence of festivity
Occasioned by black mother-earth's good will
To children, as they took her vintage-gifts, —
Found — not the least of many benefits —

That wine unlocked the stiffest lip, and loosed
The tongue late dry and reticent of joke,
Through custom's gripe which gladness thrusts aside.
So, emulating liberalities,
Heaven joined with earth for that god's day at least,
Renewed man's privilege, grown obsolete,
Of telling truth nor dreading punishment.
Whereon the joyous band disguised their forms
With skins, beast-fashion, daubed each phiz with dregs,
Then hollaed 'Neighbor, you are fool, you — knave,
You — hard to serve, you — stingy to reward!'
The guiltless crowed, the guilty sunk their crest,
And good folk gained thereby, 't was evident.
Whence, by degrees, a birth of happier thought,
The notion came — not simply this to say,
But this to do — prove, put in evidence,
And act the fool, the knave, the harsh, the hunks,
Who *did* prate, cheat, shake fist, draw purse-string tight,
As crowd might see, which only heard before.

"So played the Poet, with his man of parts;
And all the others, found unqualified
To mount cart and be persons, made the mob,
Joined choros, fortified their fellows' fun,
Anticipated the community,
Gave judgment which the public ratified.
Suiting rough weapon doubtless to plain truth,
They flung, for word-artillery, why — filth;
Still, folk who wiped the unsavory salute
From visage, would prefer the mess to wit —
Steel, poked through midriff with a civil speech,
As now the way is: then, the kindlier mode
Was — drub not stab, ribroast not scarify!

So did Sousarion introduce, and so
Did I, acceding, find the Comic Art:
Club, — if I call it, — notice what 's implied!
An engine proper for rough chastisement,
No downright slaying: with impunity —
Provided crabtree, steeped in oily joke,
Deal only such a bruise as laughter cures.
I kept the gained advantage: stickled still
For club-law — stout fun and allowanced thumps:
Knocked in each knob a crevice to hold joke
As fig-leaf holds the fat-fry.

"Next, whom thrash?
Only the coarse fool and the clownish knave?
Higher, more artificial, composite
Offence should prove my prowess, eye and arm!
Not who robs henroost, tells of untaxed figs,
Spends all his substance on stewed ellops-fish,
Or gives a pheasant to his neighbor's wife:
No! strike malpractice that affects the State,
The common weal — intriguer or poltroon,
Venality, corruption, what care I
If shrewd or witless merely? — so the thing
Lay sap to aught that made Athenai bright
And happy, change her customs, lead astray
Youth or age, play the demagogue at Pnux,
The sophist in Palaistra, or — what 's worst,
As widest mischief, — from the Theatre
Preach innovation, bring contempt on oaths,
Adorn licentiousness, despise the Cult.
Are such to be my game? Why, then there wants
Quite other cunning than a cudgel-sweep!
Grasp the old stout stock, but new tip with steel
Each boss, if I would bray — no callous hide
Simply, but Lamachos in coat of proof,

Or Kleon cased about with impudence!
Shaft pushed no worse while point pierced sparkling so
That none smiled 'Sportive, what seems savagest,
— Innocuous anger, spiteless rustic mirth!'
Yet spiteless in a sort, considered well,
Since I pursued my warfare till each wound
Went through the mere man, reached the principle
Worth purging from Athenai. Lamachos?
No, I attacked war's representative;
Kleon? No, flattery of the populace;
Sokrates? No, but that pernicious seed
Of sophists whereby hopeful youth is taught
To jabber argument, chop logic, pore
On sun and moon, and worship Whirligig.
O your tragedian, with the lofty grace,
Aims at no other and effects as much?
Candidly: what 's a polished period worth,
Filed curt sententiousness of loaded line,
When he who deals out doctrine, primly steps
From just that selfsame moon he maunders of,
And, blood-thinned by his pallid nutriment,
Proposes to rich earth-blood — purity?
In me, 't was equal-balanced flesh rebuked
Excess alike in stuff-guts Glauketes
Or starveling Chairephon; I challenged both, —
Strong understander of our common life,
I urged sustainment of humanity.
Whereas when your tragedian cries up Peace —
He 's silent as to cheesecakes Peace may chew;
Seeing through rabble-rule, he shuts his eye
To what were better done than crowding Pnux —
That 's — dance '*Threttanelo*, the Kuklops drunk!'

"My power has hardly need to vaunt itself!
Opposers peep and mutter, or speak plain:
'No naming names in Comedy!' votes one,
'Nor vilifying live folk!' legislates
Another, 'Urge amendment on the dead!'
'Don't throw away hard cash,' supplies a third,
'But crib from actor's dresses, choros-treats!'
Then Kleon did his best to bully me:
Called me before the Law Court: 'Such a play
Satirized citizens with strangers there,
Such other,' — why, its fault was in myself!
I was, this time, the stranger, privileged
To act no play at all, — Egyptian, I —
Rhodian or Kameirensian, Aiginete,
Lindian, or any foreigner he liked —
Because I can't write Attic, probably!
Go ask my rivals, — how they roughed my fleece,
And how, shorn pink themselves, the huddled sheep
Shiver at distance from the snapping shears!
Why must they needs provoke me?

"All the same,
No matter for my triumph, I foretell
Subsidence of the day-star: quench his beams
No Aias e'er was equal to the feat
By throw of shield, tough-hided seven times seven,
'Twixt sky and earth! 't is dullards soft and sure
Who breathe against his brightest, here a sigh
And there a 'So let be, we pardon you!'
Till the minute mist hangs a block, has tamed
Noonblaze to 'twilight mild and equable,'
Vote the old women spinning out of doors.
Give me the earth-spasm, when the lion ramped
And the bull gendered in the grave gold flare!
O you shall have amusement, — better still,

Instruction! no more horse-play, naming names,
Taxing the fancy when plain sense will serve!
Thearion, now, my friend who bakes you bread,
What 's worthier limning than his household life?
His whims and ways, his quarrels with the spouse,
And how the son, instead of learning knead
Kilikian loaves, brings heart-break on his sire
By buying horseflesh branded *San*, each flank,
From shrewd Menippos who imports the ware:
While pretty daughter Kepphé too much haunts
The shop of Sporgilos the barber! brave!
Out with Thearion's meal-tub politics
In lieu of Pisthetairos, Strepsiades!
That 's your exchange? O Muse of Megara!
Advise the fools '*Feed babe on weasel-lap*
*For wild-boar's marrow, Cheiron's hero-pap,*
*And rear, for man — Ariphrades, mayhap!*'
Yes, my Balaustion, yes, my Euthukles,
That 's *your* exchange, — who, foreigners in fact
And fancy, would impose your squeamishness
On sturdy health, and substitute such brat
For the right offspring of us Rocky Ones,
Because babe kicks the cradle, — crows, not mewls!

"Which brings me to the prime fault, poison-speck
Whence all the plague springs — that first feud of all
'Twixt me and you and your Euripides.
'Unworld the world' frowns he, my opposite.
I cry, 'Life!' 'Death,' he groans, 'our better Life!'
Despise what is — the good and graspable,
Prefer the out of sight and in at mind,
To village-joy, the well-side violet-patch,
The jolly club-feast when our field 's in soak,
Roast thrushes, hare-soup, pea-soup, deep washed
down

With Peparethian; the prompt paying off
That black-eyed brown-skinned country-flavored wench
We caught among our brushwood foraging:
On these look fig-juice, curdle up life's cream,
And fall to magnifying misery!
Or, if you condescend to happiness,
Why, talk, talk, talk about the empty name
While thing's self lies neglected 'neath your nose!
*I* need particular discourtesy
And private insult from Euripides
To render contest with him credible?
Say, all of me is outraged! one stretched sense,
I represent the whole Republic, — gods,
Heroes, priests, legislators, poets, — prone,
And pummelled into insignificance,
If will in him were matched with power of stroke.
For see what he has changed or hoped to change!
How few years since, when he began the fight,
Did there beat life indeed Athenai through!
Plenty and peace, then! Hellas thunder-smote
The Persian. He himself had birth, you say,
That morn salvation broke at Salamis,
And heroes still walked earth. Themistokles —
Surely his mere back-stretch of hand could still
Find, not so lost in dark, Odusseus? — he
Holding as surely on to Herakles, —
Who touched Zeus, link by link, the unruptured chain!
Were poets absent? Aischulos might hail —
With Pindaros, Theognis, — whom for sire?
Homeros' self, departed yesterday!
While Hellas, saved and sung to, then and thus, —
Ah, people, — ah, lost antique liberty!
We lived, ourselves, undoubted lords of earth:

Wherever olives flourish, corn yields crop
To constitute our title — ours such land!
Outside of oil and breadstuff, — barbarism!
What need of conquest? Let barbarians starve!
Devote our whole strength to our sole defence,
Content with peerless native products, home,
Beauty profuse in earth's mere sights and sounds,
Such men, such women, and such gods their guard!
The gods? he worshipped best who feared them most,
And left their nature uninquired into,
— Nature? their very names! pay reverence,
Do sacrifice for our part, theirs would be
To prove benignantest of playfellows.
With kindly humanism they countenanced
Our emulation of divine escapes
Through sense and soul: soul, sense are made to use;
Use each, acknowledging its god the while!
Crush grape, dance, drink, indulge, for Bacchos' sake!
'T is Aphrodité's feast-day — frisk and fling,
Provided we observe our oaths, and house
Duly the stranger: Zeus takes umbrage else!
Ah, the great time — had I been there to taste!
Perikles, right Olumpian, — occupied
As yet with getting an Olumpos reared
Marble and gold above Akropolis, —
Wisely so spends what thrifty fools amassed
For cut-throat projects. Who carves Promachos?
Who writes the Oresteia?

"Ah, the time!
For, all at once, a cloud has blanched the blue,
A cold wind creeps through the close vineyard-rank,
The olive-leaves curl, violets crisp and close
Like a nymph's wrinkling at the bath's first splash

On breast. (Your pardon!) There's a restless change,
Deterioration. Larks and nightingales
Are silenced, here and there a gor-crow grim
Flaps past, as scenting opportunity.
Where Kimon passaged to the Boulé once,
A starveling crew, unkempt, unshorn, unwashed,
Occupy altar-base and temple-step,
Are minded to indoctrinate our youth!
How call these carrion kill-joys that intrude?
'Wise men,' their nomenclature! Prodikos —
Who scarce could, unassisted, pick his steps
From way Theseia to the Tripods' way, —
This empty noddle comprehends the sun, —
How he 's Aigina's bigness, wheels no whit
His way from east to west, nor wants a steed!
And here 's Protagoras sets wrongheads right,
Explains what virtue, vice, truth, falsehood mean,
Makes all we seemed to know prove ignorance
Yet knowledge also, since, on either side
Of any question, something is to say,
Nothing to 'stablish, all things to disturb!
And shall youth go and play at kottabos,
Leaving unsettled whether moon-spots breed?
Or dare keep Choes ere the problem 's solved —
Why should I like my wife who dislikes me?
'But sure the gods permit this, censure that?'
So tell them! straight the answer 's in your teeth:
'You relegate these points, then, to the gods?
What and where are they?' What my sire supposed,
And where yon cloud conceals them! 'Till they 'scape
And scramble down to Leda, as a swan,
Europa, as a bull! why not as — ass
To somebody? Your sire was Zeus perhaps!

Either — away with such ineptitude!
Or, wanting energy to break your bonds,
Stick to the good old stories, think the rain
Is — Zeus distilling pickle through a sieve!
Think thunder 's thrown to break Theoros' head
For breaking oaths first! Meanwhile let ourselves
Instruct your progeny you prate like fools
Of father Zeus, who 's but the atmosphere,
Brother Poseidon, otherwise called — sea,
And son Hephaistos — fire and nothing else!
Over which nothings there 's a something still,
"Necessity," that rules the universe
And cares as much about your Choes-feast
Performed or intermitted, as you care
Whether gnats sound their trump from head or tail!'
When, stupefied at such philosophy,
We cry — Arrest the madmen, governor!
Pound hemlock and pour bull's-blood, Perikles! —
Would you believe? The Olumpian bends his brow,
Scarce pauses from his building! 'Say they thus?
Then, they say wisely. Anaxagoras,
I had not known how simple proves eclipse
But for thy teaching! Go, fools, learn like me!'

"Well, Zeus nods: man must reconcile himself,
So, let the Charon's-company harangue,
And Anaxagoras be — as we wish!
A comfort is in nature: while grass grows
And water runs, and sesame pricks tongue,
And honey from Brilesian hollow melts
On mouth, and Bacchis' flavorous lip beats both,
You will not be untaught life's use, young man?
*Pho!* My young man just proves that panniered ass
Said to have borne Youth strapped on his stout back,
With whom a serpent bargained, bade him swap,

The priceless boon for — water to quench thirst!
What 's youth to my young man? In love with age,
He Spartanizes, argues, fasts and frowns,
Denies the plainest rules of life, long since
Proved sound; sets all authority aside,
Must simply recommence things, learn ere act,
And think out thoroughly how youth should pass —
Just as if youth stops passing, all the same!

"One last resource is left us — poetry!
Vindicate nature, prove Plataian help,
Turn out, a thousand strong, all right and tight,
To save Sense, poet! Bang the sophist-brood
Would cheat man out of wholesome sustenance
By swearing wine is water, honey — gall,
Saperdion — the Empousa! Panic-smit,
Our juveniles abstain from Sense and starve:
Be yours to disenchant them! Change things back!
Or better, strain a point the other way
And handsomely exaggerate wronged truth!
Lend wine a glory never gained from grape,
Help honey with a snatch of him we style
The Muses' Bee, bay-bloom-fed Sophokles,
And give Saperdion a Kimberic robe!

" 'I, his successor,' gruff the answer grunts,
'Incline to poetize philosophy,
Extend it rather than restrain; as thus —
Are heroes men? No more, and scarce as much,
Shall mine be represented. Are men poor?
Behold them ragged, sick, lame, halt and blind!
Do they use speech? Ay, street-terms, market-phrase!
Having thus drawn sky earthwards, what comes next
But dare the opposite, lift earth to sky?

Mere puppets once, I now make womankind,
For thinking, saying, doing, match the male.
Lift earth? I drop to, dally with, earth's dung!
— Recognize in the very slave — man's mate,
Declare him brave and honest, kind and true,
And reasonable as his lord, in brief.
I paint men as they are — so runs my boast — 2129
Not as they should be: paint — what 's part of man
— Women and slaves — not as, to please your pride,
They should be, but your equals, as they are.
O and the Gods! Instead of abject mien,
Submissive whisper, while my Choros cants
"Zeus, — with thy cubit's length of attributes, —
May I, the ephemeral, ne'er scrutinize
Who made the heaven and earth and all things there!"
Myself shall say' . . . Ay, Herakles may help!
Give me, — I want the very words, — attend!"

He read. Then "Murder 's out, — 'There are no Gods, 2140
Man has no master, owns, by consequence,
No right, no wrong, except to please or plague
His nature: what man likes be man's sole law!
Still, since he likes Saperdion, honey, figs,
Man may reach freedom by your roundabout.
'Never believe yourselves the freer thence!
There are no gods, but there 's "Necessity," —
Duty enjoined you, fact in figment's place,
Throned on no mountain, native to the mind!
Therefore deny yourselves Saperdion, figs 2150
And honey, for the sake of — what I dream,
A-sitting with my legs up!'

"Infamy!
The poet casts in calm his lot with these

Assailants of Apollon! Sworn to serve
Each Grace, the Furies call him minister —
He, who was born for just that roseate world
Renounced so madly, where what 's false is fact,
Where he makes beauty out of ugliness,
Where he lives, life itself disguised for him
As immortality — so works the spell,
The enthusiastic mood which marks a man
Muse-mad, dream-drunken, wrapt around by verse,
Encircled with poetic atmosphere,
As lark emballed by its own crystal song,
Or rose enmisted by that scent it makes!
No, this were unreality! the real
He wants, not falsehood, — truth alone he seeks,
Truth, for all beauty! Beauty, in all truth —
That 's certain somehow! Must the eagle lilt
Lark-like, needs fir-tree blossom rose-like? No!
Strength and utility charm more than grace,
And what 's most ugly proves most beautiful.
So much assistance from Euripides!

"Whereupon I betake me, since needs must,
To a concluding — 'Go and feed the crows!
Do! Spoil your art as you renounce your life,
Poetize your so precious system, do,
Degrade the hero, nullify the god,
Exhibit women, slaves and men as peers, —
Your castigation follows prompt enough!
When all 's concocted upstairs, heels o'er head,
Down must submissive drop the masterpiece
For public praise or blame: so, praise away,
Friend Sokrates, wife's-friend Kephisophon!
Boast innovations, cramp phrase, uncouth song,
Hard matter and harsh manner, gods, men, slaves
And women jumbled to a laughing-stock

Which Hellas shall hold sides at lest she split!
Hellas, on these, shall have her word to say!

"She has it and she says it — there 's the curse! —
She finds he makes the shag-rag hero-race,
The noble slaves, wise women, move as much
Pity and terror as true tragic types:
Applauds inventiveness — the plot so new,
The turn and trick subsidiary so strange!
She relishes that homely phrase of life,
That common town-talk, more than trumpet-blasts:
Accords him right to chop and change a myth:
What better right had he, who told the tale
In the first instance, to embellish fact?
This last may disembellish yet improve!
Both find a block: this man carves back to bull
What first his predecessor cut to sphynx:
Such genuine actual roarer, nature's brute,
Intelligible to our time, was sure
The old-world artist's purpose, had he worked
To mind; this both means and makes the thing!
If, past dispute, the verse slips oily-bathed
In unctuous music — say, effeminate —
We also say, like Kuthereia's self,
A lulling effluence which enswathes some isle
Where hides a nymph, not seen but felt the more.
That 's Hellas' verdict!

"Does Euripides
Even so far absolved, remain content?
Nowise! His task is to refine, refine,
Divide, distinguish, subtilize away
Whatever seemed a solid planting-place
For foot-fall, — not in that phantasmal sphere
Proper to poet, but on vulgar earth

Where people used to tread with confidence.
There 's left no longer one plain positive
Enunciation incontestable
Of what is good, right, decent here on earth.
Nobody now can say 'This plot is mine,
Though but a plethron square, — my duty!' —
'Yours?
Mine, or at least not yours,' snaps somebody!
And, whether the dispute be parent-right
Or children's service, husband's privilege
Or wife's submission, there 's a snarling straight,
Smart passage of opposing 'yea' and 'nay,'
'Should,' 'should not,' till, howe'er the contest end,
Spectators go off sighing — Clever thrust!
Why was I so much hurried to pay debt,
Attend my mother, sacrifice an ox,
And set my name down 'for a trireme, good'?
Something I might have urged on t' other side!
No doubt, Chresphontes or Bellerophon
We don't meet every day; but Stab-and-stitch
The tailor — ere I turn the drachmas o'er
I owe him for a chiton, as he thinks,
I 'll pose the blockhead with an argument!

"So has he triumphed, your Euripides!
Oh, I concede, he rarely gained a prize:
That 's quite another matter! cause for that!
Still, when 't was got by Ions, Iophons,
Off he would pace confoundedly superb,
Supreme, no smile at movement on his mouth
Till Sokrates winked, whispered: out it broke!
And Aristullos jotted down the jest,
While Iophons or Ions, bay on brow,
Looked queerly, and the foreigners — like you —
Asked o'er the border with a puzzled smile

— 'And so, you value Ions, Iophons,
Euphorions! How about Euripides?'
(Eh, brave bard's-champion? Does the anger boil?
Keep within bounds a moment, — eye and lip
Shall loose their doom on me, their fiery worst!)
What strangers? Archelaos heads the file!
He sympathizes, he concerns himself,
He pens epistle, each successless play:
'Athenai sinks effete; there 's younger blood
In Makedonia. Visit where I rule!
Do honor to me and take gratitude!
Live the guest's life, or work the poet's way,
Which also means the statesman's: he who wrote
Erechtheus may seem rawly politic
At home where Kleophon is ripe; but here
My council-board permits him choice of seats.'

"Now this was operating, — what should prove
A poison-tree, had flowered far on to fruit
For many a year, — when I was moved, first man,
To dare the adventure, down with root and branch.
So, from its sheath I drew my Comic steel,
And dared what I am now to justify.
A serious question first, though!

"Once again!
Do you believe, when I aspired in youth,
I made no estimate of power at all,
Nor paused long, nor considered much, what class
Of fighters I might claim to join, beside
That class wherewith I cast in company?
Say, you — profuse of praise no less than blame —
Could not I have competed — franker phrase
Might trulier correspond to meaning — still,
Competed with your Tragic paragon?

Suppose me minded simply to make verse,
To fabricate, parade resplendent arms,
Flourish and sparkle out a Trilogy, —
Where was the hindrance? But my soul bade 'Fight!
Leave flourishing for mock-foe, pleasure-time;
Prove arms efficient on real heads and hearts!'
How? With degeneracy sapping fast
The Marathonian muscle, nerved of old
To maul the Mede, now strung at best to help
— How did I fable? — War and Hubbub mash
To mincemeat Fatherland and Brotherhood,
Pound in their mortar Hellas, State by State,
That greed might gorge, the while frivolity
Rubbed hands and smacked lips o'er the dainty dish!
Authority, experience — pushed aside
By any upstart who pleads throng and press
O' the people! 'Think, say, do thus!' Wherefore, pray?
'We are the people: who impugns our right
Of choosing Kleon that tans hide so well,
Huperbolos that turns out lamps so trim,
Hemp-seller Eukrates or Lusikles
Sheep-dealer, Kephalos the potter's son,
Diitriphes who weaves the willow-work
To go round bottles, and Nausikudes
The meal-man? Such we choose and more, their mates,
To think and say and do in our behalf!'
While sophistry wagged tongue, emboldened still,
Found matter to propose, contest, defend,
'Stablish, turn topsyturvy, — all the same,
No matter what, provided the result
Were something new in place of something old, —
Set wagging by pure insolence of soul
Which needs must pry into, have warrant for

Each right, each privilege good policy
Protects from curious eye and prating mouth!
Everywhere lust to shape the world anew,
Spurn this Athenia as we find her, build
A new impossible Cloudcuckooburg
For feather-headed birds, once solid men,
Where rules, discarding jolly habitude,
Nourished on myrtle-berries and stray ants,
King Tereus who, turned Hoopoe Triple-Crest,
Shall terrify and bring the gods to terms!

"Where was I? Oh! Things ailing thus — I ask,
What cure? Cut, thrust, hack, hew at heap-on-heaped
Abomination with the exquisite
Palaistra-tool of polished Tragedy?
Erechtheus shall harangue Amphiktuon,
And incidentally drop word of weight
On justice, righteousness, so turn aside
The audience from attacking Sicily! —
The more that Choros, after he recounts
How Phrixos rode the ram, the far-famed Fleece,
Shall add — at last fall of grave dancing-foot —
'Aggression never yet was helped by Zeus!'
That helps or hinders Alkibiades?
As well expect, should Pheidias carve Zeus' self
And set him up, some half a mile away,
His frown would frighten sparrows from your field!
Eagles may recognize their lord, belike,
But as for vulgar sparrows, — change the god,
And plant some big Priapos with a pole!
I wield the Comic weapon rather — hate!
Hate! honest, earnest and directest hate —
Warfare wherein I close with enemy,
Call him one name and fifty epithets,

Remind you his great-grandfather sold bran,
Describe the new exomion, sleeveless coat
He knocked me down last night and robbed me of,
Protest he voted for a tax on air!
And all this hate — if I write Comedy —
Finds tolerance, most like — applause, perhaps
True veneration; for I praise the god
Present in person of his minister,
And pay — the wilder my extravagance —
The more appropriate worship to the Power
Adulterous, night-roaming, and the rest:
Otherwise, — that originative force
Of nature, impulse stirring death to life,
Which, underlying law, seems lawlessness,
Yet is the outbreak which, ere order be,
Must thrill creation through, warm stocks and stones,
Phales Iacchos.

"Comedy for me!
Why not for you, my Tragic masters? Sneaks
Whose art is mere desertion of a trust!
Such weapons lay to hand, the ready club,
The clay-ball, on the ground a stone to snatch, —
Arms fit to bruise the boar's neck, break the chine
O' the wolf, — and you must impiously — despise?
No, I 'll say, furtively let fall that trust
Consigned you! 'T was not 'take or leave alone.'
But 'take and, wielding, recognize your god
In his prime attributes!' And though full soon
You sneaked, subsided into poetry,
Nor met your due reward, still, — heroize
And speechify and sing-song and forego
Far as you may your function, — still its pact
Endures, one piece of early homage still
Exacted of you; after your three bouts

At hoitytoity, great men with long words,
And so forth, — at the end, must tack itself
The genuine sample, the Satyric Play,
Concession, with its wood-boys' fun and freak,
To the true taste of the mere multitude.
Yet, there again! What does your Still-at-itch,
Always-the-innovator? Shrugs and shirks!
Out of his fifty Trilogies, some five
Are somehow suited: Satyrs dance and sing,
Try merriment, a grimly prank or two,
Sour joke squeezed through pursed lips and teeth on edge,
Then quick on top of toe to pastoral sport,
Goat-tending and sheep-herding, cheese and cream,
Soft grass and silver rillets, country-fare —
When throats were promised Thasian! Five such feats, —
Then frankly off he threw the yoke: next Droll,
Next festive drama, covenanted fun,
Decent reversion to indecency,
Proved — your 'Alkestis'! There 's quite fun enough,
Herakles drunk! From out fate's blackening wave
Calamitous, just zigzags some shot star,
Poor promise of faint joy, and turns the laugh
On dupes whose fears and tears were all in waste!

"For which sufficient reasons, in truth's name,
I closed with whom you count the Meaner Muse,
Classed me with Comic Poets who should weld
Dark with bright metal, show their blade may keep
Its adamantine birthright though a-blaze
With poetry, the gold, and wit, the gem,
And strike mere gold, unstiffened out by steel,

Or gem, no iron joints its strength around,
From hand of — posturer, not combatant!

"Such was my purpose: it succeeds, I say!
Have not we beaten Kallikratidas,
Not humbled Sparté? Peace awaits our word,
Spite of Theramenes, and fools his like.
Since my previsions, — warranted too well
By the long war now waged and worn to end —
Had spared such heritage of misery,
My after-counsels scarce need fear repulse.
Athenai, taught prosperity has wings,
Cages the glad recapture. Demos, see,
From folly's premature decrepitude
Boiled young again, emerges from the stew
Of twenty-five years' trouble, sits and sways,
One brilliance and one balsam, — sways and sits
Monarch of Hellas! ay and, sage again,
No longer jeopardizes chieftainship,
No longer loves the brutish demagogue
Appointed by a bestial multitude
But seeks out sound advisers. Who are they?
Ourselves, of parentage proved wise and good!
To such may hap strains thwarting quality,
(As where shall want its flaw mere human stuff?)
Still, the right grain is proper to right race;
What 's contrary, call curious accident!
Hold by the usual! Orchard-grafted tree,
Not wilding, race-horse-sired, not rouncey-born,
Aristocrat, no sausage-selling snob!
Nay, why not Alkibiades, come back
Filled by the Genius, freed of petulance,
Frailty, — mere youthfulness that 's all at fault, —
Advanced to Perikles and something more?
— Being at least our duly born and bred, —

Curse on what chaunoprockt first gained his ear
And got his . . . well, once true man in right place,
Our commonalty soon content themselves 2450
With doing just what they are born to do,
Eat, drink, make merry, mind their own affairs
And leave state-business to the larger brain.
I do not stickle for their punishment;
But certain culprits have a cloak to twitch,
A purse to pay the piper: flog, say I,
Your fine fantastics, paragons of parts,
Who choose to play the important! Far from side
With us, their natural supports, allies, —
And, best by brain, help who are best by birth 2460
To fortify each weak point in the wall
Built broad and wide and deep for permanence
Between what 's high and low, what 's rare and vile, —
They cast their lot perversely in with low
And vile, lay flat the barrier, lift the mob
To dizzy heights where Privilege stood firm.
And then, simplicity become conceit, —
Woman, slave, common soldier, artisan,
Crazy with new-found worth, new-fangled claims, —
These must be taught next how to use their heads
And hands in driving man's right to mob's rule! 2471
What fellows thus inflame the multitude?
Your Sokrates, still crying 'Understand!'
Your Aristullos, — 'Argue!' Last and worst,
Should, by good fortune, mob still hesitate,
Remember there 's degree in heaven and earth,
Cry 'Aischulos enjoined us fear the gods,
And Sophokles advised respect the kings!'
Why, your Euripides informs them — 'Gods? 2749
They are not! Kings? They are, but . . . do not I,
In Suppliants, make my Theseus, — yours, no more, —

Fire up at insult of who styles him King?
Play off that Herald, I despise the most,
As patronizing kings' prerogative
Against a Theseus proud to dare no step
Till he consult the people?'

"Such as these —
Ah, you expect I am for strangling straight?
Nowise, Balaustion! All my roundabout
Ends at beginning, with my own defence.
I dose each culprit just with — Comedy.
Let each be doctored in exact the mode
Himself prescribes: by words, the word-monger —
My words to his words, — my lies, if you like,
To his lies. Sokrates I nickname thief,
Quack, necromancer; Aristullos, — say,
Male Kirké who bewitches and bewrays
And changes folk to swine; Euripides, —
Well, I acknowledge! Every word is false,
Looked close at; but stand distant and stare through,
All 's absolute indubitable truth
Behind lies, truth which only lies declare!
For come, concede me truth 's in thing not word,
Meaning not manner! Love smiles 'rogue' and 'wretch'
When 'sweet' and 'dear' seem vapid: Hate adopts
Love's 'sweet' and 'dear' when 'rogue' and 'wretch' fall flat:
Love, Hate — are truths, then, each, in sense not sound.
Further: if Love, remaining Love, fell back
On 'sweet' and 'dear,' — if Hate, though Hate the same,
Dropped down to 'rogue' and 'wretch,' — each phrase were false.

Good! and now grant I hate no matter whom
With reason: I must therefore fight my foe,
Finish the mischief which made enmity.
How? By employing means to most hurt him
Who much harmed me. What way did he do harm?
Through word or deed? Through word? with word, wage war!
Word with myself directly? As direct
Reply shall follow: word to you, the wise,
Whence indirectly came the harm to me?
What wisdom I can muster waits on such.
Word to the populace which, misconceived
By ignorance and incapacity,
Ends in no such effect as follows cause
When I, or you the wise, are reasoned with,
So damages what I and you hold dear?
In that event, I ply the populace
With just such word as leavens their whole lump
To the right ferment for my purpose. *They*
Arbitrate properly between us both?
*They* weigh my answer with his argument,
Match quip with quibble, wit with eloquence?
All they attain to understand is — blank!
Two adversaries differ: which is right
And which is wrong, none takes on him to say,
Since both are unintelligible. Pooh!
Swear my foe's mother vended herbs she stole,
They fall a-laughing! Add, — his household drudge
Of all-work justifies that office well,
Kisses the wife, composing him the play, —
They grin at whom they gaped in wonderment,
And go off — 'Was he such a sorry scrub?
This other seems to know! we praised too fast!'
Why then, my lies have done the work of truth,
Since 'scrub,' improper designation, means

Exactly what the proper argument
— Had such been comprehensible — proposed
To proper audience — were I graced with such —
Would properly result in; so your friend
Gets an impartial verdict on his verse
'The tongue swears, but the soul remains unsworn!'

"There, my Balaustion! All is summed and said.
No other cause of quarrel with yourself!
Euripides and Aristophanes
Differ: he needs must round our difference
Into the mob's ear; with the mob I plead.
You angrily start forward 'This to me?'
No speck of this on you the thrice refined!
Could parley be restricted to us two,
My first of duties were to clear up doubt
As to our true divergence each from each.
Does my opinion so diverge from yours?
Probably less than little — not at all!
To know a matter, for my very self
And intimates — that 's one thing; to imply
By 'knowledge' — loosing whatsoe'er I know
Among the vulgar who, by mere mistake,
May brain themselves and me in consequence, —
That 's quite another. 'O the daring flight!
This only bard maintains the exalted brow,
Nor grovels in the slime nor fears the gods!'
Did *I* fear — *I* play superstitious fool,
Who, with the due proviso, introduced,
Active and passive, their whole company
As creatures too absurd for scorn itself?
Zeus? I have styled him — 'slave, mere thrashing-block!'
I 'll tell you: in my very next of plays,
At Bacchos' feast, in Bacchos' honor, full

In front of Bacchos' representative,
I mean to make main-actor — Bacchos' self!
Forth shall he strut, apparent, first to last,
A blockhead, coward, braggart, liar, thief,
Demonstrated all these by his own mere
Xanthias the man-slave: such man shows such god
Shamed to brute-beastship by comparison!
And when ears have their fill of his abuse,
And eyes are sated with his pummelling, —
My Choros taking care, by, all the while,
Singing his glory, that men recognize
A god in the abused and pummelled beast, —
Then, should one ear be stopped of auditor,
Should one spectator shut revolted eye, —
Why, the Priest's self will first raise outraged voice
'Back, thou barbarian, thou ineptitude!
Does not most license hallow best our day,
And least decorum prove its strictest rite?
Since Bacchos bids his followers play the fool,
And there 's no fooling like a majesty
Mocked at, — who mocks the god, obeys the law —
Law which, impute but indiscretion to,
And . . . why, the spirit of Euripides
Is evidently active in the world!'
Do I stop here? No! feat of flightier force!
See Hermes! what commotion raged, — reflect! —
When imaged god alone got injury
By drunkards' frolic! How Athenai stared
Aghast, then fell to frenzy, fit on fit, —
Ever the last the longest! At this hour,
The craze abates a little; so, my Play
Shall have up Hermes: and a Karion, slave,
(Since there 's no getting lower) calls our friend
The profitable god, we honor so,
Whatever contumely fouls the mouth —

Bids him go earn more honest livelihood
By washing tripe in well-trough — wash he does,
Duly obedient! Have I dared my best?
Asklepios, answer! — deity in vogue,
Who visits Sophokles familiarly,
If you believe the old man, — at his age,
Living is dreaming, and strange guests haunt door
Of house, belike, peep through and tap at times
When a friend yawns there, waiting to be fetched, —
At any rate, to memorize the fact,
He has spent money, set an altar up
In the god's temple, now in much repute.
That temple-service trust me to describe —
Cheaters and choused, the god, his brace of girls,
Their snake, and how they manage to snap gifts
'And consecrate the same into a bag,'
For whimsies done away with in the dark!
As if, a stone's throw from that theatre
Whereon I thus unmask their dupery,
The thing were not religious and august!

"Of Sophokles himself — nor word nor sign
Beyond a harmless parody or so!
He founds no anti-school, upsets no faith,
But, living, lets live, the good easy soul
Who, — if he saves his cash, unpoetlike,
Loves wine and — never mind what other sport,
Boasts for his father just a sword-blade-smith,
Proves but queer captain when the people claim,
For one who conquered with 'Antigone,'
The right to undertake a squadron's charge, —
And needs the son's help now to finish plays,
Seeing his dotage calls for governance
And Iophon to share his property, —
Why, of all this, reported true, I breathe

Not one word — true or false, I like the man.
Sophokles lives and lets live: long live he!
Otherwise, — sharp the scourge and hard the blow!

"And what 's my teaching but — accept the old,
Contest the strange! acknowledge work that 's done,
Misdoubt men who have still their work to do!
Religions, laws and customs, poetries,
Are old? So much achieved victorious truth!
Each work was product of a life-time, wrung
From each man by an adverse world: for why?
He worked, destroying other older work
Which the world loved and so was loth to lose.
Whom the world beat in battle — dust and ash!
Who beat the world, left work in evidence,
And wears its crown till new men live new lives,
And fight new fights, and triumph in their turn.
I mean to show you on the stage: you 'll see
My Just Judge only venture to decide
Between two suitors, which is god, which man,
By thrashing both of them as flesh can bear.
You shall agree, — whichever bellows first,
He 's human; who holds longest out, divine:
That is the only equitable test.
Cruelty? Pray, who pricked them on to court
My thong's award? Must they needs dominate?
Then I — rebel. Their instinct grasps the new?
Mine bids retain the old: a fight must be,
And which is stronger the event will show.
O but the pain! Your proved divinity
Still smarts all reddened? And the rightlier served!
Was not some man's-flesh in him, after all?
Do let us lack no frank acknowledgment
There 's nature common to both gods and men!
All of them — spirit? What so winced was clay.

Away pretence to some exclusive sphere
Cloud-nourishing a sole selected few
Fume-fed with self-superiority!
I stand up for the common coarse-as-clay
Existence, — stamp and ramp with heel and hoof
On solid vulgar life, you fools disown.
Make haste from your unreal eminence,
And measure lengths with me upon that ground
Whence this mud-pellet sings and summons you!
I know the soul, too, how the spark ascends
And how it drops apace and dies away.
I am your poet-peer, man thrice your match.
I too can lead an airy life when dead,
Fly like Kinesias when I 'm cloudward bound;
But here, no death shall mix with life it mars.

"So, my old enemy who caused the fight,
Own I have beaten you, Euripides!
Or, — if your advocate would contravene, —
Help him, Balaustion! Use the rosy strength!
I have not done my utmost, — treated you
As I might Aristullos, mint-perfumed, —
Still, let the whole rage burst in brave attack!
Don't pay the poor ambiguous compliment
Of fearing any pearl-white knuckled fist
Will damage this broad buttress of a brow!
Fancy yourself my Aristonumos,
Ameipsias or Sannurion: punch and pound!
Three cuckoos who cry 'cuckoo'! much I care!
They boil a stone! *Neblaretai! Rattei!*"

---

Cannot your task have end here, Euthukles?
Day by day glides our galley on its path:
Still sunrise and still sunset, Rhodes half-reached,
And still, my patient scribe! no sunset's peace

Descends more punctual than that brow's incline
O'er tablets which your serviceable hand
Prepares to trace. Why treasure up, forsooth,
These relics of a night that make me rich,
But, half-remembered merely, leave so poor
Each stranger to Athenai and her past?
For — how remembered! As some greedy hind
Persuades a honeycomb, beyond the due,
To yield its hoarding, — heedless what alloy
Of the poor bee's own substance taints the gold
Which, unforced, yields few drops, but purity, —
So would you fain relieve of load this brain,
Though the hived thoughts must bring away, with strength,
What words and weakness, strength's receptacle —
Wax from the store! Yet, — aching soothed away, —
Accept the compound! No suspected scent
But proves some rose was rifled, though its ghost
Scarce lingers with what promised musk and myrrh.
No need of farther squeezing. What remains
Can only be Balaustion, just her speech.

Ah, but — because speech serves a purpose still! —

---

He ended with that flourish. I replied,

Fancy myself your Aristonumos?
Advise me, rather, to remain myself,
Balaustion, — mindful what mere mouse confronts
The forest-monarch Aristophanes!
I who, a woman, claim no quality
Beside the love of all things lovable
Created by a power pre-eminent
In knowledge, as in love I stand perchance,
— You, the consummately-creative! How

Should I, then, dare deny submissive trust
To any process aiming at result
Such as you say your songs are pregnant with?
Result, all judge: means, let none scrutinize
Save those aware how glory best is gained
By daring means to end, ashamed of shame,
Constant in faith that only good works good,
While evil yields no fruit but impotence!
Graced with such plain good, I accept the means.
Nay, if result itself in turn become
Means, — who shall say? — to ends still loftier yet, —
Though still the good prove hard to understand,
The bad still seemingly predominate, —
Never may I forget which order bears
The burden, toils to win the great reward,
And finds, in failure, the grave punishment,
So, meantime, claims of me a faith I yield!
Moreover, a mere woman, I recoil
From what may prove man's-work permissible,
Imperative. Rough strokes surprise: what then?
Some lusty armsweep needs must cause the crash
Of thorn and bramble, ere those shrubs, those flowers,
We fain would have earth yield exclusively,
Are sown, matured and garlanded for boys
And girls, who know not how the growth was gained.
Finally, am I not a foreigner?
No born and bred Athenian, — isled about,
I scarce can drink, like you, at every breath,
Just some particular doctrine which may best
Explain the strange thing I revolt against —
How — by involvement, who may extricate? —
Religion perks up through impiety,
Law leers with license, folly wise-like frowns,
The seemly lurks inside the abominable.
But opposites, — each neutralizes each

Haply by mixture: what should promise death,
May haply give the good ingredient force,
Disperse in fume the antagonistic ill.
This institution, therefore, — Comedy, —
By origin, a rite, — by exercise,
Proved an achievement tasking poet's power
To utmost, eking legislation out
Beyond the legislator's faculty,
Playing the censor where the moralist
Declines his function, far too dignified
For dealing with minute absurdities:
By efficacy, — virtue's guard, the scourge
Of vice, each folly's fly-flap, arm in aid
Of all that 's righteous, customary, sound
And wholesome; sanctioned therefore, — better say,
Prescribed for fit acceptance of this age
By, not alone the long recorded roll
Of earlier triumphs but, success to-day —
(The multitude as prompt recipient still
Of good gay teaching from that monitor
They crowned this morning — Aristophanes —
As when Sousarion's car first traversed street) —
This product of Athenai — *I* dispute,
Impugn? There 's just one only circumstance
Explains that! I, poor critic, see, hear, feel;
But eyes, ears, senses prove me — foreigner!
Who shall gainsay that the raw new-come guest
Blames oft, too sensitive? On every side
Of — larger than your stage — life's spectacle,
Convention here permits and there forbids
Impulse and action, nor alleges more
Than some mysterious "So do all, and so
Does no one:" which the hasty stranger blames
Because, who bends the head unquestioning,

Transgresses, turns to wrong what else were right,
By failure of a reference to law
Beyond convention; blames unjustly, too —
As if, through that defect, all gained were lost
And slave-brand set on brow indelibly; —
Blames unobservant or experienceless
That men, like trees, if stout and sound and sane,
Show stem no more affected at the root
By bough's exceptional submissive dip
Of leaf and bell, light danced at end of spray
To windy fitfulness in wayward sport —
No more lie prostrate — than low files of flower
Which, when the blast goes by, unruffled raise
Each head again o'er ruder meadow-wreck
Of thorn and thistle that refractory
Demurred to cower at passing wind's caprice.
Why shall not guest extend like charity,
Conceive how, — even when astounded most
That native seem to acquiesce in muck
Changed by prescription, they affirm, to gold, —
Such may still bring to test, still bear away
Safely and surely much of good and true
Though latent ore, themselves unspecked, unspoiled?
Fresh bathed i' the icebrook, any hand may pass
A placid moment through the lamp's fierce flame:
And who has read your Lemnians, seen The Hours,
Heard Female-Playhouse-seat-Preoccupants,
May feel no worse effect than, once a year,
Those who leave decent vesture, dress in rags
And play the mendicant, conform thereby
To country's rite, and then, no beggar-taint
Retained, don vesture due next morrow-day.
What if I share the stranger's weakness then?
Well, could I also show his strength, his sense
Untutored, ay! — but then untampered with!

I fancy, though the world seems old enough,
Though Hellas be the sole unbarbarous land,
Years may conduct to such extreme of age,
And outside Hellas so isles new may lurk,
That haply, — when and where remain a dream! —
In fresh days when no Hellas fills the world,
In novel lands as strange where, all the same,
Their men and women yet behold, as we,
Blue heaven, black earth, and love, hate, hope and fear,
Over again, unhelped by Attiké —
Haply some philanthropic god steers bark,
Gift-laden, to the lonely ignorance
Islanded, say, where mist and snow mass hard
To metal — ay, those Kassiterides!
Then asks: "Ye apprehend the human form.
What of this statue, made to Pheidias' mind,
This picture, as it pleased our Zeuxis paint?
Ye too feel truth, love beauty: judge of these!"
Such strangers may judge feebly, stranger-like:
"Each hair too indistinct — for, see our own!
Hands, not skin-colored as these hands we have,
And lo, the want of due decorum here!
A citizen, arrayed in civic garb,
Just as he walked your streets apparently,
Yet wears no sword by side, adventures thus,
In thronged Athenai! foolish painter's-freak!
While here 's his brother-sculptor found at fault
Still more egregiously, who shames the world,
Shows wrestler, wrestling at the public games,
Atrociously exposed from head to foot!"
Sure, the Immortal would impart at once
Our slow-stored knowledge, how small truths suppressed
Conduce to the far greater truth's display, —

Would replace simple by instructed sense,
And teach them how Athenai first so tamed
The natural fierceness that her progeny
Discarded arms nor feared the beast in man:
Wherefore at games, where earth's wise gratitude,
Proved by responsive culture, claimed the prize
For man's mind, body, each in excellence, —
When mind had bared itself, came body's turn,
And only irreligion grudged the gods
One naked glory of their master-work
Where all is glorious rightly understood, —
The human frame; enough that man mistakes:
Let him not think the gods mistaken too!

But, peradventure, if the stranger's eye
Detected . . . Ah, too high my fancy-flight!
Pheidias, forgive, and Zeuxis bear with me —
How on your faultless should I fasten fault
Of my own framing, even? Only say,
Suppose the impossible were realized,
And some as patent incongruity,
Unseemliness, — of no more warrant, there
And then, then now and here, whate'er the time
And place, — I say, the Immortal — who can doubt? —
Would never shrink, but own "The blot escaped
Our artist: thus he shows humanity."

May stranger tax one peccant part in thee,
Poet, three-parts divine? May I proceed?
"Comedy is prescription and a rite."
Since when? No growth of the blind antique time,
"It rose in Attiké with liberty;
When freedom falls, it too will fall." Scarce so!
Your games, — the Olympian, Zeus gave birth to these;

Your Pythian, — these were Phoibos' institute.
Isthmian, Nemeian, — Theseus, Herakles
Appointed each, the boys and barbers say!
Earth's day is growing late: where 's Comedy?
"Oh, that commenced an age since, — two, belike,
In Megara, whence here they brought the thing!"
Or I misunderstand, or here 's the fact —
Your grandsire could recall that rustic song,
How suchanone was thief, and miser such
And how, — immunity from chastisement
Once promised to bold singers of the same
By daylight on the drunkard's holiday, —
The clever fellow of the joyous troop
Tried acting what before he sang about,
Acted and stole, or hoarded, acting too:
While his companions ranged a-row, closed up
For Choros, — bade the general rabblement
Sit, see, hear, laugh, — not join the dance themselves.
Soon, the same clever fellow found a mate,
And these two did the whole stage-mimicking,
Still closer in approach to Tragedy, —
So led the way to Aristophanes,
Whose grandsire saw Sousarion, and whose sire —
Chionides; yourself wrote "Banqueters"
When Aischulos had made "Prometheus," nay,
All of the marvels; Sophokles, — I 'll cite,
"Oidipous" — and Euripides — I bend
The head — "Medeia" henceforth awed the world!
"Banqueters," "Babylonians" — next come you!
Surely the great days that left Hellas free
Happened before such advent of huge help,
Eighty-years-late assistance? Marathon,
Plataia, Salamis were fought, I think,

Before new educators stood reproved,
Or foreign legates blushed, excepted to!
Where did the helpful rite pretend its rise?
Did it break forth, as gifts divine are wont,
Plainly authentic, incontestably
Adequate to the helpful ordinance?
Founts, dowered with virtue, pulse out pure from source;
'T is there we taste the god's benign intent:
Not when, — fatigued away by journey, foul
With brutish trampling, — crystal sinks to slime,
And lymph forgets the first salubriousness.
Sprang Comedy to light thus crystal-pure?
"Nowise!" yourself protest with vehemence;
"Gross, bestial, did the clowns' diversion break;
Every successor paddled in the slush;
Nay, my contemporaries one and all
Gay played the mudlark till I joined their game;
Then was I first to change buffoonery
For wit, and stupid filth for cleanly sense,
Transforming pointless joke to purpose fine,
Transfusing rude enforcement of home-law —
'Drop knave's-tricks, deal more neighbor-like, ye boors!' —
With such new glory of poetic breath
As, lifting application far past use
O' the present, launched it o'er men's lowly heads
To future time, when high and low alike
Are dead and done with, while my airy power
Flies disengaged, as vapor from what stuff
It — say not, dwelt in — fitlier, dallied with
To forward work, which done, — deliverance brave, —
It soars away, and mud subsides to dust.
Say then, myself invented Comedy!"

So mouths full many a famed Parabasis!
Agreed! No more, then, of prescriptive use,
Authorization by antiquity,
For what offends our judgment! 'T is your work,
Performed your way: not work delivered you
Intact, intact producible in turn.
Everywhere have you altered old to new —
Your will, your warrant: therefore, work must stand
Or stumble by intrinsic worth. What worth?
Its aim and object! Peace you advocate,
And war would fain abolish from the land:
Support religion, lash irreverence,
Yet laughingly administer rebuke
To superstitious folly, — equal fault!
While innovating rashness, lust of change,
New laws, new habits, manners, men and things,
Make your main quarry, — "oldest" meaning "best."
You check the fretful litigation-itch,
Withstand mob-rule, expose mob-flattery,
Punish mob-favorites; most of all press hard
On sophists who assist the demagogue,
And poets their accomplices in crime.
Such your main quarry: by the way, you strike
Ignobler game, mere miscreants, snob or scamp,
Cowardly, gluttonous, effeminate:
Still with a bolt to spare when dramatist
Proves haply unproficient in his art.
Such aims — alone, no matter for the means —
Declare the unexampled excellence
Of their first author — Aristophanes!

Whereat — Euripides, oh, not thyself —
Augustlier than the need! — thy century
Of subjects dreamed and dared and done, before

"Banqueters" gave dark earth enlightenment,
Or "Babylonians" played Prometheus here, —
These let me summon to defend thy cause!
Lo, as indignantly took life and shape
Labor by labor, all of Herakles, —
Palpably fronting some o'erbold pretence
"Eurustheus slew the monsters, purged the world!"
So shall each poem pass you and imprint
Shame on the strange assurance. *You* praised Peace?
Sing him full-face, Kresphontes! "Peace" the theme?
"Peace, in whom depths of wealth lie, — of the blest
Immortals beauteousest, —
Come! for the heart within me dies away,
So long dost thou delay!
O I have feared lest old age, much annoy,
Conquer me, quite outstrip the tardy joy,
Thy gracious triumph-season I would see,
The song, the dance, the sport, profuse of crowns to be.
But come! for my sake, goddess great and dear,
Come to the city here?
Hateful Sedition drive thou from our homes,
With Her who madly roams
Rejoicing in the steel against the life
That 's whetted — banish Strife!"

Shall I proceed? No need of next and next!
That were too easy, play so presses play,
Trooping tumultuous, each with instance apt,
Each eager to confute the idle boast.
What virtue but stands forth panegyrized,
What vice, unburned by stigma, in the books
Which bettered Hellas, — beyond graven gold
Or gem-indenture, sung by Phoibos' self

And saved in Kunthia's mountain treasure-house —
Ere you, man, moralist, were youth or boy?
— Not praise which, in the proffer, mocks the praised
By sly admixture of the blameworthy
And enforced coupling of base fellowship, —
Not blame which gloats the while it frowning laughs,
"Allow one glance on horrors — laughable!" —
This man's entire of heart and soul, discharged
Its love or hate, each unalloyed by each,
On objects worthy either; earnestness,
Attribute him, and power! but novelty?
Nor his nor yours a doctrine — all the world's!
What man of full-grown sense and sanity
Holds other than the truth, — wide Hellas through, —
Though truth, he acts, discredit truth he holds?
What imbecile has dared to formulate
"Love war, hate peace, become a litigant!" —
And so preach on, reverse each rule of right
Because he quarrels, combats, goes to law?
No, for his comment runs, with smile or sigh
According to heart's temper, "Peace were best,
Except occasions when we put aside
Peace, and bid all the blessings in her gift
Quick join the crows, for sake of Marathon!"

"Nay," you reply; for one, whose mind withstands
His heart, and, loving peace, for conscience' sake
Wants war, — you find a crowd of hypocrites
Whose conscience means ambition, grudge and greed.
On such, reproof, sonorous doctrine, melts
Distilled like universal but thin dew
Which all too sparsely covers country: dear,
No doubt, to universal crop and clown,
Still, each bedewed keeps his own head-gear dry
With upthrust *skiadeion*, shakes adroit

The droppings to his neighbor. No! collect
All of the moisture, leave unhurt the heads
Which nowise need a washing, save and store
And dash the whole condensed to one fierce spout
On some one evildoer, sheltered close, —
The fool supposed, — till you beat guard away,
And showed your audience, not that war was wrong,
But Lamachos absurd, — case, crests and all, —
Not that democracy was blind of choice,
But Kleon and Huperbolos were shams:
Not superstition vile, but Nikias crazed, —
The concrete for the abstract; that 's the way!
What matters Choros crying "Hence, impure!"
You cried "Ariphrades does thus and thus!"
Now, earnestness seems never earnest more
Than when it dons for garb — indifference;
So there 's much laughing: but, compensative,
When frowning follows laughter, then indeed
Scout innuendo, sarcasm, irony! —
Wit's polished warfare glancing at first graze
From off hard headpiece, coarsely-coated brain
O' the commonalty — whom, unless you prick
To purpose, what avails that finer pates
Succumb to simple scratching? Those — not these —
'T is Multitude, which, moved, fines Lamachos,
Banishes Kleon and burns Sokrates,
House over head, or, better, poisons him.
Therefore in dealing with King Multitude,
Club-drub the callous numskulls! In and in
Beat this essential consequential fact
That here they have a hater of the three,
Who hates in word, phrase, nickname, epithet
And illustration, beyond doubt at all!
And similarly, would you win assent
To — Peace, suppose? You tickle the tough hide

With good plain pleasure her concomitant —
And, past mistake again, exhibit Peace —
Peace, vintager and festive, cheesecake-time,
Hare-slice-and-peasoup-season, household joy:
Theoria's beautiful belongings match
Opora's lavish condescendings: brief,
Since here the people are to judge, you press
Such argument as people understand:
If with exaggeration — what care you?

Have I misunderstood you in the main?
No! then must answer be, such argument,
Such policy, no matter what good love
Or hate it help, in practice proves absurd,
Useless and null: henceforward intercepts
Sober effective blow at what you blame,
And renders nugatory rightful praise
Of thing or person. The coarse brush has daubed —
What room for the fine limner's pencil-mark?
Blame? You curse, rather, till who blames must blush —
Lean to apology or praise, more like!
Does garment, simpered o'er as white, prove gray?
"Black, blacker than Acharnian charcoal, black
Beyond Kimmerian, Stugian blackness black,"
You bawl, till men sigh "nearer snowiness!"
What follows? What one faint-rewarding fall
Of foe belabored ne'er so lustily?
Laugh Lamachos from out the people's heart?
He died, commanding, "hero," say yourself?
Gibe Nikias into privacy? — nay, shake
Kleon a little from his arrogance
By cutting him to shoe-sole-shreds? I think,
He ruled his life long and, when time was ripe,
Died fighting for amusement, — good tough hide!

Sokrates still goes up and down the streets,
And Aristullos puts his speech in book,
When both should be abolished long ago.
Nay, wretchedest of rags, Ariphrades —
You have been fouling that redoubtable
Harp-player, twenty years, with what effect?
Still he strums on, strums ever cheerily,
And earns his wage, — "Who minds a joke?" men say.
No, friend! The statues stand — mudstained at most —
Titan or pygmy: what achieves their fall
Will be, long after mud is flung and spent,
Some clear thin spirit-thrust of lightning — truth!

Your praise, then — honey-smearing helps your friend,
More than blame's ordure-smirch hurts foe, perhaps?
Peace, now, misunderstood, ne'er prized enough,
You have interpreted to ignorance
Till ignorance opes eye, bat-blind before,
And for the first time knows Peace means the power
On maw of pan-cake, cheese-cake, barley-cake,
No stop nor stint to stuffing. While, in camp,
Who fights chews rancid tunny, onions raw,
Peace sits at cosy feast with lamp and fire,
Complaisant smooth-sleeked flute-girls giggling gay.
How thick and fast the snow falls, freezing War
Who shrugs, campaigns it, and may break a shin
Or twist an ankle! come, who hesitates
To give Peace, over War, the preference?
Ah, friend — had this indubitable fact
Haply occurred to poor Leonidas,
How had he turned tail on Thermopulai!
It cannot be that even his few wits

Were addled to the point that, so advised,
Preposterous he had answered — "Cakes are prime,
Hearth-sides are snug, sleek dancing-girls have worth,
And yet — for country's sake, to save our gods
Their temples, save our ancestors their tombs,
Save wife and child and home and liberty, —
I would chew sliced-salt-fish, bear snow — nay, starve,
If need were, — and by much prefer the choice!"
Why, friend, your genuine hero, all the while,
Has been — who served precisely for your butt —
Kleonumos that, wise, cast shield away
On battle-ground; cried "Cake my buckler be,
Embossed with cream-clot! peace, not war, I choose,
Holding with Dikaiopolis!" Comedy
Shall triumph, Dikaiopolis win assent,
When Miltiades shall next shirk Marathon,
Themistokles swap Salamis for — cake,
And Kimon grunt "Peace, grant me dancing-girls!"
But sooner, hardly! twenty-five years since,
The war began, — such pleas for Peace have reached
A reasonable age. The end shows all.
And so with all the rest you advocate!
"Wise folk leave litigation! 'ware the wasps!
Whoso loves law and lawyers, heliast-like,
Wants hemlock!" None shows that so funnily.
But, once cure madness, how comports himself
Your same exemplar, what 's our gain thereby?
Philokleon turns Bdelukleon! just this change, —
New sanity gets straightway drunk as sow,
Cheats baker-wives, brawls, kicks, cuffs, curses folk,
Parades a shameless flute-girl, bandies filth
With his own son who cured his father's cold

By making him catch fever — funnily!
But as for curing love of lawsuits — faugh!

And how does new improve upon the old
— Your boast — in even abusing? Rough, may be, —
Still, honest was the old mode. "Call thief — thief!"
But never call thief even — murderer!
Much less call fop and fribble, worse one whit
Than fribble and fop! Spare neither! beat your brains
For adequate invective, — cut the life
Clean out each quality, — but load your lash
With no least lie, or we pluck scourge from hand!
Does poet want a whipping, write bad verse,
Inculcate foul deeds? There 's the fault to flog!
You vow "The rascal cannot read nor write,
Spends more in buying fish than Morsimos,
Somebody helps his Muse and courts his wife,
His uncle deals in crockery, and last, —
Himself 's a stranger!" That 's the cap and crown
Of stinging-nettle, that 's the master-stroke!
What poet-rival, — after "housebreaker,"
"Fish-gorging," "midnight footpad" and so forth, —
Proves not, beside, "a stranger"? Chased from charge
To charge, and, lie by lie, laughed out of court, —
Lo, wit's sure refuge, satire's grand resource —
All, from Kratinos downward — "strangers" they!
Pity the trick 's too facile! None so raw
Among your playmates but have caught the ball
And sent it back as briskly to — yourself!
You too, my Attic, are styled "stranger" — Rhodes,
Aigina, Lindos or Kameiros, — nay,
'T was Egypt reared, if Eupolis be right,
Who wrote the comedy (Kratinos vows)

Kratinos helped a little! Kleon's self
Was nigh promoted Comic, when he haled
My poet into court, and o'er the coals
Hauled and re-hauled "the stranger, — insolent,
Who brought out plays, usurped our privilege!"
Why must you Comics one and all take stand
On lower ground than truth from first to last?
Why all agree to let folk disbelieve,
So laughter but reward a funny lie?
Repel such onslaughts — answer, sad and grave,
Your fancy-fleerings — who would stoop so low?
Your own adherents whisper, — when disgust
Too menacingly thrills Logeion through
At — Perikles invents this present war
Because men robbed his mistress of three maids —
Or — Sokrates wants burning, house o'er head, —
"What, so obtuse, not read between the lines?
Our poet means no mischief! All should know —
Ribaldry here implies a compliment!
He deals with things, not men, — his men are things —
Each represents a class, plays figure-head
And names the ship: no meaner than the first
Would serve; he styles a trireme 'Sokrates' —
Fears 'Sokrates' may prove unseaworthy
(That 's merely — 'Sophists are the bane of boys')
Rat-riddled ('they are capable of theft'),
Rotten or whatsoe'er shows ship-disease,
('They war with gods and worship whirligig').
You never took the joke for earnest? scarce
Supposed mere figure-head meant entire ship,
And Sokrates — the whole fraternity?"

This then is Comedy, our sacred song,
Censor of vice, and virtue's guard as sure:
Manners-instructing, morals' stop-estray,

Which, born a twin with public liberty,
Thrives with its welfare, dwindles with its wane!
Liberty? what so exquisitely framed
And fitted to suck dry its life of life
To last faint fibre? — since that life is truth.
You who profess your indignation swells
At sophistry, when specious words confuse
Deeds right and wrong, distinct before, you say —
(Though all that 's done is — dare veracity,
Show that the true conception of each deed
Affirmed, in vulgar parlance, "wrong" or "right,"
Proves to be neither, as the hasty hold,
But, change your side, shoots light, where dark alone
Was apprehended by the vulgar sense)
You who put sophistry to shame, and shout
"There 's but a single side to man and thing;
A side so much more big than thing or man
Possibly can be, that — believe 't is true?
Such were too marvellous simplicity!" —
Confess, those sophists whom yourself depict,
( — Abide by your own painting!) what they teach,
They wish at least their pupil to believe,
And, what believe, to practise! Did *you* wish
Hellas should haste, as taught, with torch in hand,
And fire the horrid Speculation-shop?
Straight the shop's master rose and showed the mob
What man was your so monstrous Sokrates;
Himself received amusement, why not they?
Just as did Kleon first play magistrate
And bid you put your birth in evidence —
Since no unbadged buffoon is licensed here
To shame us all when foreign guests may mock —
Then, — birth established, fooling licensed you, —
He, duty done, resumed mere auditor,
Laughed with the loudest at his Lamia-shape,

Kukloboros-roaring, and the camel-rest.
Nay, Aristullos, -- once your volley spent
On the male-Kirkê and her swinish crew, —
Platon, — so others call the youth we love, —
Sends your performance to the curious king —
"Do you desire to know Athenai's knack
At turning seriousness to pleasantry?
Read this! One Aristullos means myself.
The author is indeed a merry grig!"
Nay, it would seem as if yourself were bent
On laying down the law "Tell lies I must —
Aforethought and of purpose, no mistake!"
When forth yourself step, tell us from the stage
"Here you behold the King of Comedy —
Me, who, the first, have purged my every piece
From each and all my predecessors' filth,
Abjured those satyr-adjuncts sewn to bid
The boys laugh, satyr-jokes whereof not one
Least sample but would make my hair turn gray
Beyond a twelvemonth's ravage! I renounce
Mountebank-claptrap, such as firework-fizz
And torchflare, or else nuts and barleycorns
Scattered among the crowd, to scramble for
And stop their mouths with; no such stuff shames me!
Who, — what 's more serious, — know both when to strike
And when to stay my hand: once dead, my foe,
Why, done, my fighting! *I* attack a corpse?
I spare the corpse-like even! punish age?
I pity from my soul that sad effete
Toothless old mumbler called Kratinos! once
My rival, — now, alack, the dotard slinks
Ragged and hungry to what hole 's his home;
Ay, slinks thro' byways where no passenger

Flings him a bone to pick. You formerly
Adored the Muses' darling: dotard now,
Why, he may starve! O mob most mutable!"
So you harangued in person; while, — to point
Precisely out, these were but lies you launched, —
Prompt, a play followed primed with satyr-frisks,
No spice spared of the stomach-turning stew,
Full-fraught with torch-display, and barley-throw,
And Kleon, dead enough, bedaubed afresh;
While daft Kratinos — home to hole trudged he,
Wrung dry his wit to the last vinous dregs,
Decanted them to "Bottle," — beat, next year, —
"Bottle" and dregs — your best of "Clouds" and dew!
Where, Comic King, may keenest eye detect
Improvement on your predecessors' work
Except in lying more audaciously?

Why — genius! That 's the grandeur, that 's the gold —
That 's *you* — superlatively true to touch —
Gold, leaf or lump — gold, anyhow the mass
Takes manufacture and proves Pallas' casque
Or, at your choice, simply a cask to keep
Corruption from decay. Your rivals' hoard
May ooze forth, lacking such preservative:
Yours cannot — gold plays guardian far too well!
Genius, I call *you:* dross, your rivals share;
Ay, share and share alike, too! says the world,
However you pretend supremacy
In aught beside that gold, your very own.
Satire? "Kratinos for our satirist!"
The world cries. Elegance? "Who elegant
As Eupolis?" resounds as noisily.
Artistic fancy? Choros-creatures quaint?

Magnes invented "Birds" and "Frogs" enough,
Archippos punned, Hegemon parodied,
To heart's content, before you stepped on stage.
Moral invective? Eupolis exposed
"That prating beggar, he who stole the cup,"
Before your "Clouds" rained grime on Sokrates;
Nay, what beat "Clouds" but "Konnos," muck
for mud?
Courage? How long before, well-masked, you poured
Abuse on Eukrates and Lusikles,
Did Telekleides and Hermippos pelt
Their Perikles and Kumon? standing forth,
Bareheaded, not safe crouched behind a name, —
Philonides or else Kallistratos,
Put forth, when danger threatened, — mask for face,
To bear the brunt, — if blame fell, take the blame, —
If praise . . . why, frank laughed Aristophanes
"They write such rare stuff? No, I promise you!"
Rather, I see all true improvements, made
Or making, go against you — tooth and nail
Contended with; 't is still Moruchides,
'T is Euthumenes, Surakosios, nay,
Argurrhios and Kinesias, — common sense
And public shame, these only cleanse your sty!
Coerced, prohibited, — you grin and bear,
And, soon as may be, hug to heart again
The banished nastiness too dear to drop!
Krates could teach and practise festive song
Yet scorn scurrility; as gay and good,
Pherekrates could follow. *Who* loosed hold,
Must let fall rose-wreath, stoop to muck once more?
Did your particular self advance in aught,
Task the sad genius — steady slave the while —
To further — say, the patriotic aim?
No, there 's deterioration manifest

Year by year, play by play! survey them all,
From that boy's-triumph when "Acharnes" dawned,
To "Thesmophoriazousai," — this mans'-shame!
There, truly, patriot zeal so prominent
Allowed friends' plea perhaps: the baser stuff
Was but the nobler spirit's vehicle.
Who would imprison, unvolatilize
A violet's perfume, blends with fatty oils
Essence too fugitive in flower alone;
So, calling unguent — violet, call the play —
Obscenity impregnated with "Peace"!
But here 's the boy grown bald, and here 's the play
With twenty years' experience: where 's one spice
Of odor in the hog's-lard? what pretends
To aught except a grease-pot's quality?
Friend, sophist-hating! know, — worst sophistry
Is when man's own soul plays its own self false,
Reasons a vice into a virtue, pleads
"I detail sin to shame its author" — not
"I shame Ariphrades for sin's display"!
"I show Opora to commend Sweet Home" —
Not "I show Bacchis for the striplings' sake!"

Yet all the same — O genius and O gold —
Had genius ne'er diverted gold from use
Worthy the temple, to do copper's work
And coat a swine's trough — which abundantly
Might furnish Phoibos' tripod, Pallas' throne!
Had you, I dream, discarding all the base,
The brutish, spurned alone convention's watch
And ward against invading decency
Disguised as license, law in lawlessness,
And so, re-ordinating outworn rule,
Made Comedy and Tragedy combine,
Prove some new Both-yet-neither, all one bard,

Euripides with Aristophanes
Co-operant! this, reproducing Now,
As that gave Then existence: Life to-day,
This, as that other — Life dead long ago!
The mob decrees such feat no crown, perchance,
But — why call crowning the reward of quest?
Tell him, my other poet, — where thou walk'st
Some rarer world than e'er Ilissos washed!

But dream goes idly in the air. To earth!
Earth's question just amounts to — which succeeds,
Which fails of two life-long antagonists?
Suppose my charges all mistake! assume
Your end, despite ambiguous means, the best —
The only! you and he, a patriot-pair,
Have striven alike for one result — say, Peace!
You spoke your best straight to the arbiters —
Our people: have you made them end this war
By dint of laughter and abuse and lies
And postures of Opora? Sadly — No!
This war, despite your twenty-five years' work,
May yet endure until Athenai falls,
And freedom falls with her. So much for you!
Now, the antagonist Euripides —
Has he succeeded better? Who shall say?
He spoke quite o'er the heads of Kleon's crowd
To a dim future, and if there he fail,
Why, you are fellows in adversity.
But that 's unlike the fate of wise words launched
By music on their voyage. Hail, Depart,
Arrive, Glad Welcome! Not my single wish —
Yours also wafts the white sail on its way,
Your nature too is kingly. All beside
I call pretension — no true potentate,
Whatever intermediary be crowned,

Zeus or Poseidon, where the vulgar sky
Lacks not Triballos to complete the group.
I recognize, — behind such phantom-crew, —
Necessity, Creation, Poet's Power,
Else never had I dared approach, appeal
To poetry, power, Aristophanes!
But I trust truth's inherent kingliness,
Trust who, by reason of much truth, shall reign
More or less royally — may prayer but push
His sway past limit, purge the false from true!
Nor, even so, had boldness nerved my tongue
But that the other king stands suddenly,
In all the grand investiture of death,
Bowing your knee beside my lowly head —
Equals one moment!

Now, arise and go!
Both have done homage to Euripides!

Silence pursued the words: till he broke out —

"Scarce so! This constitutes, I may believe,
Sufficient homage done by who defames
Your poet's foe, since you account me such;
But homage-proper, — pay it by defence
Of him, direct defence and not oblique,
Not by mere mild admonishment of me!"

Defençe? The best, the only! I replied.
A story goes — When Sophokles, last year,
Cited before tribunal by his son
(A poet — to complete the parallel)
Was certified unsound of intellect,
And claimed as only fit for tutelage,
Since old and doating and incompetent

To carry on this world's work, — the defence
Consisted just in his reciting (calm
As the verse bore, which sets our heart a-swell
And voice a-heaving too tempestuously)
That choros-chant "The station of the steed,
Stranger! thou comest to, — Kolonos white!"
Then he looked round and all revolt was dead.
You know the one adventure of my life —
What made Euripides Balaustion's friend.
When I last saw him, as he bade farewell,
"I sang another 'Herakles,' " smiled he;
"It gained no prize: your love be prize I gain!
Take it — the tablets also where I traced
The story first with stulos pendent still —
Nay, the psalterion may complete the gift,
So, should you croon the ode bewailing Age,
Yourself shall modulate — same notes, same strings —
With the old friend who loved Balaustion once."
There they lie! When you broke our solitude,
We were about to honor him once more
By reading the consummate Tragedy.
Night is advanced; I have small mind to sleep;
May I go on, and read, — so make defence,
So test true godship? You affirm, not I,
— Beating the god, affords such test: *I* hold
That when rash hands but touch divinity,
The chains drop off, the prison-walls dispart,
And — fire! — he fronts mad Pentheus! Dare we try?

Accordingly I read the perfect piece.

# HERAKLES

*PERSONS IN THE "HERAKLES"*

AMPHITRUON.
MEGARA.
LUKOS.
HERAKLES.
IRIS.
LUTTA (*Madness*).
*Messenger.*
THESEUS.
*Choros of Aged Thebans.*

AMPHITRUON

Zeus' Couchmate, — who of mortals knows not me,
Argive Amphitruon whom Alkaios sired
Of old, as Perseus him, I — Herakles?
My home, this Thebai where the earth-born spike
Of Sown-ones burgeoned: Ares saved from these
A handful of their seed that stocks to-day
With children's children Thebai, Kadmos built.
Of these had Kreon birth, Menoikeus' child,
King of the country, — Kreon that became
The father of this woman, Megara,
Whom, when time was, Kadmeians one and all
Pealed praise to, marriage-songs with fluted help,
While to my dwelling that grand Herakles
Bore her, his bride. But, leaving Thebes — where I
Abode perforce — this Megara and those
Her kinsmen, the desire possessed my son
Rather to dwell in Argos, that walled work,
Kuklopian city, which I fly, myself,
Because I slew Elektruon. Seeking so

To ease away my hardships and once more
Inhabit his own land, for my return
Heavy the price he pays Eurustheus there —
The letting in of light on this choked world!
Either he promised, vanquished by the goad
Of Heré, or because fate willed it thus.
The other labors — why, he toiled them through;
But for this last one — down by Tainaros,
Its mouth, to Haides' realm descended he
To drag into the light the three-shaped hound
Of Hell: whence Herakles returns no more.
Now, there 's an old-world tale, Kadmeians have,
How Dirkê's husband was a Lukos once,
Holding the seven-towered city here in sway
Before they ruled the land, white-steeded pair,
The twins Amphion, Zethos, born to Zeus.
This Lukos' son, — named like his father too,
No born Kadmeian but Euboia's gift, —
Comes and kills Kreon, lords it o'er the land,
Falling upon our town sedition-sick.
To us, akin to Kreon, just that bond
Becomes the worst of evils, seemingly;
For, since my son is in the earth's abysms,
This man of valor, Lukos, lord and king,
Seeks now to slay these sons of Herakles,
And slay his wife as well, — by murder thus
Thinking to stamp out murder, — slay too me,
(If me 't is fit you count among men still, —
Useless old age) and all for fear lest these,
Grown men one day, exact due punishment
Of bloodshed and their mother's father's fate.
I therefore, since he leaves me in these domes,
The children's household guardian, — left, when earth's
Dark dread he underwent, that son of mine, —

I, with their mother, lest his boys should die,
Sit at this altar of the saviour Zeus
Which, glory of triumphant spear, he raised
Conquering — my nobly-born! — the Minuai.
Here do we guard our station, destitute
Of all things, drink, food, raiment, on bare ground
Couched side by side: sealed out of house and home
Sit we in a resourcelessness of help.
Our friends — why, some are no true friends, I see!
The rest, that are true, want the means to aid
So operates in man adversity:
Whereof may never anybody — no,
Though half of him should really wish me well, —
Happen to taste! a friend-test faultless, that!

MEGARA

Old man, who erst didst raze the Taphian town,
Illustriously, the army-leader, thou,
Of speared Kadmeians — how gods play men false!
I, now, missed nowise fortune in my sire,
Who, for his wealth, was boasted mighty once,
Having supreme rule, — for the love of which
Leap the long lances forth at favored breasts, —
And having children too: and me he gave
Thy son, his house with that of Herakles
Uniting by the far-famed marriage-bed.
And now these things are dead and flown away,
While thou and I await our death, old man,
These Herakleian boys too, whom — my chicks —
I save beneath my wings like brooding bird.
But one or other falls to questioning
"O mother," cries he, "where in all the world
Is father gone to? What 's he doing? when
Will he come back?" At fault through tender years,
They seek their sire. For me, I put them off,

Telling them stories; at each creak of doors,
All wonder "Does he come?" — and all a-foot
Make for the fall before the parent knee.
Now then, what hope, what method of escape
Facilitatest thou? — for, thee, old man,
I look to, — since we may not leave by stealth
The limits of the land, and guards, more strong
Than we, are at the outlets: nor in friends
Remain to us the hopes of safety more.
Therefore, whatever thy decision be,
Impart it for the common good of all!
Lest now should prove the proper time to die,
Though, being weak, we spin it out and live.

AMPHITRUON

Daughter, it scarce is easy, do one's best,
To blurt out counsel, things at such a pass.

MEGARA

You want some sorrow more, or so love life?

AMPHITRUON

I both enjoy life, and love hopes beside.

MEGARA

And I; but hope against hope — no, old man!

AMPHITRUON

In these delayings of an ill lurks cure.

MEGARA

But bitter is the meantime, and it bites.

AMPHITRUON

O there may be a run before the wind
From out these present ills, for me and thee,
Daughter, and yet may come my son, thy spouse!
But hush! and from the children take away
Their founts a-flow with tears, and talk them calm,
Steal them by stories — sad theft, all the same!
For, human troubles — they grow weary too;
Neither the wind-blasts always have their strength
Nor happy men keep happy to the end:
Since all things change — their natures part in twain;
And that man 's bravest, therefore, who hopes on,
Hopes ever: to despair is coward-like.

CHOROS

These domes that overroof,
This long-used couch, I come to, having made
A staff my prop, that song may put to proof
The swan-like power, age-whitened, — poet's aid
Of sobbed-forth dirges — words that stand aloof
From action now: such am I — just a shade
With night for all its face, a mere night-dream —
And words that tremble too: howe'er they seem,
Devoted words, I deem.

O, of a father ye unfathered ones,
O thou old man, and thou whose groaning stuns —
Unhappy mother — only us above,
Nor reaches him below in Haides' realm, thy love!
— (Faint not too soon, urge forward foot and limb
Way-weary, nor lose courage — as some horse
Yoked to the car whose weight recoils on him
Just at the rock-ridge that concludes his course!
Take by the hand, the peplos, any one

Whose foothold fails him, printless and fordone!
Aged, assist along me aged too,
Who, — mate with thee in toils when life was new,
And shields and spears first made acquaintance-
ship, —
Stood by thyself and proved no bastard-slip
Of fatherland when loftiest glory grew.) —
See now, how like the sire's
Each eyeball fiercely fires!
What though ill-fortune have not left his race?
Neither is gone the grand paternal grace!
Hellas! O what — what combatants, destroyed
In these, wilt thou one day seek — seek, and find all
void!

Pause! for I see the ruler of this land,
Lukos, now passing through the palace-gate.

LUKOS

The Herakleian couple — father, wife —
If needs I must, I question: "must" forsooth?
Being your master — all I please, I ask.
To what time do you seek to spin out life?
What hope, what help see, so as not to die?
Is it you trust the sire of these, that 's sunk
In Haides, will return? How past the pitch,
Suppose you have to die, you pile the woe —
Thou, casting, Hellas through, thy empty vaunts
As though Zeus helped thee to a god for son;
And thou, that thou wast styled our best man's wife!
Where was the awful in his work wound up,
If he did quell and quench the marshy snake
Or the Nemeian monster whom he snared
And — says, by throttlings of his arm, he slew?
With these do you outwrestle me? Such feats

Shall save from death the sons of Herakles
Who got praise, being naught, for bravery
In wild-beast-battle, otherwise a blank?
No man to throw on left arm buckler's weight,
Not he, nor get in spear's reach! bow he bore —
True coward's-weapon: shoot first and then fly!
No bow-and-arrow proves a man is brave,
But who keeps rank, — stands, one unwinking stare
As, ploughing up, the darts come, — brave is he.
My action has no impudence, old man!
Providence, rather: for I own I slew
Kreon, this woman's sire, and have his seat.
Nowise I wish, then, to leave, these grown-up,
Avengers on me, payment for my deeds.

AMPHITRUON

As to the part of Zeus in his own child,
Let Zeus defend that! As to mine, 't is me
The care concerns to show by argument
The folly of this fellow, — Herakles,
Whom I stand up for! since to hear thee styled —
Cowardly — that is unendurable.
First then, the infamous (for I account
Amongst the words denied to human speech,
Timidity ascribed thee, Herakles!)
This I must put from thee, with gods in proof.
Zeus' thunder I appeal to, those four steeds
Whereof he also was the charioteer
When, having shot down the earth's Giant-growth —
(Never shaft flew but found and fitted flank)
Triumph he sang in common with the gods.
The Kentaur-race, four-footed insolence —
Go ask at Pholoé, vilest thou of kings,
*Whom* they would pick out and pronounce best man,
If not my son, "the seeming-brave," say'st thou!

But Dirphus, thy Abantid mother-town,
Question her, and she would not praise, I think!
For there 's no spot, where having done some good,
Thy country thou mightst call to witness worth.
Now, that all-wise invention, archer's-gear,
Thou blamest: hear my teaching and grow sage!
A man in armor is his armor's slave,
And, mixed with rank and file that want to run,
He dies because his neighbors have lost heart.
Then, should he break his spear, no way remains
Of warding death off, — gone that body-guard,
His one and only; while, whatever folk
Have the true bow-hand, — here 's the one main good, —
Though he have sent ten thousand shafts abroad,
Others remain wherewith the archer saves
His limbs and life, too, — stands afar and wards
Away from flesh the foe that vainly stares
Hurt by the viewless arrow, while himself
Offers no full front to those opposite,
But keeps in thorough cover: there 's the point
That 's capital in combat — damage foe,
Yet keep a safe skin — foe not out of reach
As you are! Thus my words contrast with thine,
And such, in judging facts, our difference.
These children, now, why dost thou seek to slay?
What have they done thee? In a single point
I count thee wise — if, being base thyself,
Thou dread'st the progeny of nobleness.
Yet this bears hard upon us, all the same,
If we must die — because of fear in thee —
A death 't were fit thou suffer at our hands,
Thy betters, did Zeus rightly judge us all.
If therefore thou art bent on sceptre-sway,
Thyself, here — suffer us to leave the land,

Fugitives! nothing do by violence,
Or violence thyself shalt undergo
When the gods' gale may chance to change for thee!
Alas, O land of Kadmos, — for 't is thee
I mean to close with, dealing out the due
Revilement, — in such sort dost thou defend
Herakles and his children? Herakles
Who, coming, one to all the world, against
The Minuai, fought them and left Thebes an eye
Unblinded henceforth to front freedom with!
Neither do I praise Hellas, nor shall brook
Ever to keep in silence that I count
Towards my son, craven of cravens — her
Whom it behoved go bring the young ones here
Fire, spears, arms — in exchange for seas made safe,
And cleansings of the land — his labor's price.
But fire, spears, arms, — O children, neither Thebes
Nor Hellas has them for you! 'T is myself,
A feeble friend, ye look to: nothing now
But a tongue's murmur, for the strength is gone
We had once, and with age are limbs a-shake
And force a-flicker! Were I only young,
Still with the mastery o'er bone and thew,
Grasping first spear that came, the yellow locks
Of this insulter would I bloody so —
Should send him skipping o'er the Atlantic bounds
Out of my arm's reach through poltroonery!

CHOROS

Have not the really good folk starting-points
For speech to purpose, — though rare talkers they?

LUKOS

Say thou against us words thou towerest with!
I, for thy words, will deal thee blows, their due.

Go, some to Helikon, to Parnasos
Some, and the clefts there! Bid the woodmen fell
Oak-trunks, and, when the same are brought inside
The city, pile the altar round with logs,
Then fire it, burn the bodies of them all,
That they may learn thereby, no dead man rules
The land here, but 't is I, by acts like these!
As for you, old sirs, who are set against
My judgments, you shall groan for — not alone
The Herakleian children, but the fate
Of your own house beside, when faring ill
By any chance: and you shall recollect
Slaves are you of a tyranny that 's mine!

CHOROS

O progeny of earth, — whom Ares sowed
When he laid waste the dragon's greedy jaw —
Will ye not lift the staves, right-hand supports,
And bloody this man's irreligious head?
Who, being no Kadmeian, rules, — the wretch, —
Our easy youth: an interloper too!
But not of me, at least, shalt thou enjoy
Thy lordship ever; nor my labor's fruit, —
Hand worked so hard for, — have! A curse with thee,
Whence thou didst come, there go and tyrannize!
For never while I live shalt thou destroy
The Herakleian children: not so deep
Hides he below ground, leaving thee their lord!
But we bear both of you in mind, — that thou,
The land's destroyer, dost possess the land,
While he who saved it, loses every right.
*I* play the busybody — for I serve
My dead friends when they need friends' service most?

O right-hand, how thou yearnest to snatch spear
And serve indeed! in weakness dies the wish,
Or I had stayed thee calling me a slave,
And nobly drawn my breath at home in Thebes
Where thou exultest! — city that 's insane,
Sick through sedition and bad government,
Else never had she gained for master — thee!

MEGARA

Old friends, I praise you: since a righteous wrath
For friend's sake well becomes a friend. But no!
On our account in anger with your lord,
Suffer no injury! Hear my advice,
Amphitruon, if I seem to speak aright.
O yes, I love my children! how not love
What I brought forth, what toiled for? and to die —
Sad I esteem too; still, the fated way
Who stiffens him against, that man I count
Poor creature; us, who are of other mood,
Since we must die, behoves us meet our death
Not burnt to cinders, giving foes the laugh —
To me, worse ill than dying, that! We owe
Our houses many a brave deed, now to pay.
Thee, indeed, gloriously men estimate
For spear-work, so that unendurable
Were it that thou shouldst die a death of shame.
And for my glorious husband, where wants he
A witness that he would not save his boys
If touched in their good fame thereby? Since birth
Bears ill with baseness done for children's sake,
My husband needs must by my pattern here.
See now thy hope — how much I count thereon!
Thou thinkest that thy son will come to light:
And, of the dead, who came from Haides back?
But we with talk this man might mollify:

Never! Of all foes, fly the foolish one!
Wise, well-bred people, make concession to!
Sooner you meet respect by speaking soft.
Already it was in my mind — perchance
We might beg off these children's banishment;
But even that is sad, involving them
In safety, ay — and piteous poverty!
Since the host's visage for the flying friend
Has, only one day, the sweet look, 't is said.
Dare with us death, which waits thee, dared or no!
We call on thine ancestral worth, old man!
For who outlabors what the gods appoint
Shows energy, but energy gone mad.
Since what must — none e'er makes what must not be.

CHOROS

Had any one, while yet my arms were strong,
Been scorning thee, he easily had ceased.
But we are naught, now; thine henceforth to see —
Amphitruon, how to push aside these fates!

AMPHITRUON

Nor cowardice nor a desire of life
Stops me from dying: but I seek to save
My son his children. Vain! I set my heart,
It seems, upon impossibility.
See, it is ready for the sword, this throat
To pierce, divide, dash down from precipice!
But one grace grant us, king, we supplicate!
Slay me and this unhappy one before
The children, lest we see them — impious sight! —
Gasping the soul forth, calling all the while
On mother and on father's father! Else,

Do as thy heart inclines thee! No resource
Have we from death, and we resign ourselves.

MEGARA

And I too supplicate: add grace to grace,
And, though but one man, doubly serve us both!
Let me bestow adornment of the dead
Upon these children! Throw the palace wide!
For now we are shut out. Thence these shall share
At least so much of wealth was once their sire's!

LUKOS

These things shall be. Withdraw the bolts, I bid
My servants! Enter and adorn yourselves!
I grudge no peploi; but when these ye wind
About your bodies, — that adornment done, —
Then I shall come and give you to the grave.

MEGARA

O children, follow this unhappy foot,
Your mother's, into your ancestral home,
Where others have the power, are lords in truth,
Although the empty name is left us yet!

AMPHITRUON

O Zeus, in vain I had thee marriage-mate,
In vain I called thee father of my child!
Thou wast lest friendly far than thou didst seem.
I, the mere man, o'ermatch in virtue thee
The mighty god: for I have not betrayed
The Herakleian children, — whereas thou
Hadst wit enough to come clandestinely
Into the chamber, take what no man gave,

Another's place; and when it comes to help
Thy loved ones, there thou lackest wit indeed!
Thou art some stupid god or born unjust.

CHOROS

Even a dirge, can Phoibos suit
In song to music jubilant
For all its sorrow: making shoot
His golden plectron o'er the lute,
Melodious ministrant.
And I, too, am of mind to raise,
Despite the imminence of doom,
A song of joy, outpour my praise
To him — what is it rumor says? —
Whether — now buried in the ghostly gloom
Below ground, — he was child of Zeus indeed,
Or mere Amphitruon's mortal seed —
To him I weave the wreath of song, his labor's meed
For, is my hero perished in the feat?
The virtues of brave toils, in death complete,
These save the dead in song, — their glory-garland meet!

First, then, he made the wood
Of Zeus a solitude,
Slaying its lion-tenant; and he spread
The tawniness behind — his yellow head
Enmuffled by the brute's, backed by that grin of dread.
The mountain-roving savage Kentaur-race
He strewed with deadly bow about their place,
Slaying with winged shafts: Peneios knew,
Beauteously-eddying, and the long tracts too
Of pasture trampled fruitless, and as well
Those desolated haunts Mount Pelion under,

And, grassy up to Homolé, each dell
Whence, having filled their hands with pine-tree-plunder,
Horse-like was wont to prance from, and subdue
The land of Thessaly, that bestial crew.
The golden-headed spot-back'd stag he slew,
That robber of the rustics: glorified
Therewith the goddess who in hunter's pride
Slaughters the game along Oinoé's side.
And, yoked abreast, he brought the chariot-breed
To pace submissive to the bit, each steed
That in the bloody cribs of Diomede
Champed and, unbridled, hurried down that gore
For grain, exultant the dread feast before —
Of man's flesh: hideous feeders they of yore!
All as he crossed the Hebros' silver-flow
Accomplished he such labor, toiling so
For Mukenaian tyrant; ay, and more —
He crossed the Melian shore
And, by the sources of Amauros, shot
To death that strangers'-pest
Kuknos, who dwelt in Amphanaia: not
Of fame for good to guest!

And next, to the melodious maids he came,
Inside the Hesperian court-yard: hand must aim
At plucking gold fruit from the appled leaves,
Now he had killed the dragon, backed like flame,
Who guards the unapproachable he weaves
Himself all round, one spire about the same.
And into those sea-troughs of ocean dived
The hero, and for mortals calm contrived,
Whatever oars should follow in his wake.
And under heaven's mid-seat his hands thrust he,
At home with Atlas: and, for valor's sake,

Held the gods up their star-faced mansionry.
Also, the rider-host of Amazons
About Maiotis many-streamed, he went
To conquer through the billowy Euxin once,
Having collected what an armament
Of friends from Hellas, all on conquest bent
Of that gold-garnished cloak, dread girdle-chase!
So Hellas gained the girl's barbarian grace
And at Mukenai saves the trophy still —
Go wonder there, who will!

And the ten thousand-headed hound
Of many a murder, the Lernaian snake
He burned out, head by head, and cast around
His darts a poison thence, — darts soon to slake
Their rage in that three-bodied herdsman's gore
Of Erutheia. Many a running more
He made for triumph and felicity,
And, last of toils, to Haides, never dry
Of tears, he sailed: and there he, luckless, ends
His life completely, nor returns again.
The house and home are desolate of friends,
And where the children's life-path leads them, plain
I see, — no step retraceable, no god
Availing, and no law to help the lost!
The oar of Charon marks their period,
Waits to end all. Thy hands, these roofs accost! —
To thee, though absent, look their uttermost!

But if in youth and strength I flourished still,
Still shook the spear in fight, did power match will
In these Kadmeian co-mates of my age,
They would, — and I, — when warfare was to wage,
Stand by these children; but I am bereft

Of youth now, lone of that good genius left!
But hist, desist! for here come these, —
Draped as the dead go, under and over, —
Children long since, — now hard to discover, —
Of the once so potent Herakles!
And the loved wife dragging, in one tether
About her feet, the boys together;
And the hero's aged sire comes last!
Unhappy that I am! Of tears which rise, —
How am I all unable to hold fast,
Longer, the aged fountains of these eyes!

MEGARA

Be it so! Who is priest, who butcher here
Of these ill-fated ones, or stops the breath
Of me, the miserable? Ready, see,
The sacrifice — to lead where Haides lives!
O children, we are led — no lovely team
Of corpses — age, youth, motherhood, all mixed!
O sad fate of myself and these my sons
Whom with these eyes I look at, this last time!
I, indeed, bore you: but for enemies
I brought you up to be a laughing-stock,
Matter for merriment, destruction-stuff!
Woe 's me!
Strangely indeed my hopes have struck me down
From what I used to hope about you once —
The expectation from your father's talk!
For thee, now, thy dead sire dealt Argos to:
Thou wast to have Eurustheus' house one day,
And rule Pelasgia where the fine fruits grow;
And, for a stole of state, he wrapped about
Thy head with that the lion-monster bore,
That which himself went wearing armor-wise.
And thou wast King of Thebes — such chariots there!

Those plains I had for portion — all for thee,
As thou hadst coaxed them out of who gave birth
To thee, this boy: and into thy right hand
He thrust the guardian-club of Daidalos, —
Poor guardian proves the gift that plays thee false!
And upon thee he promised to bestow
Oichalia — what, with those far-shooting shafts,
He ravaged once; and so, since three you were,
With threefold kingdoms did he build you up
To very towers, your father, — proud enough
Prognosticating, from your manliness
In boyhood, what the manhood's self would be.
For my part, I was picking out for you
Brides, suiting each with his alliance — this
From Athens, this from Sparté, this from Thebes —
Whence, suited — as stern-cables steady ship —
You might have hold on life gods bless. All gone!
Fortune turns round and gives us — you, the Fates
Instead of brides — me, tears for nuptial baths,
Unhappy in my hoping! And the sire
Of your sire — he prepares the marriage-feast
Befitting Haides who plays father now —
Bitter relationship! Oh me! which first —
Which last of you shall I to bosom fold?
To whom shall I fit close, his mouth to mine?
Of whom shall I lay hold and ne'er let go?
How would I gather, like the brown-winged bee,
The groans from all, and, gathered into one,
Give them you back again, a crowded tear!
Dearest, if any voice be heard of men
Dungeoned in Haides, thee — to thee I speak!
Here is thy father dying, and thy boys!
And I too perish, famed as fortunate
By mortals once, through thee! Assist them! Come!
But come! though just a shade, appear to me!

For, coming, thy ghost-grandeur would suffice,
Such cowards are they in thy presence, these
Who kill thy children now thy back is turned!

AMPHITRUON

Ay, daughter, bid the powers below assist!
But I will rather, raising hand to heaven,
Call thee to help, O Zeus, if thy intent
Be, to these children, helpful anyway,
Since soon thou wilt be valueless enough!
And yet thou hast been called and called; in vain
I labor; for we needs must die, it seems.
Well, aged brothers — life 's a little thing!
Such as it is, then, pass life pleasantly
From day to night, nor once grieve all the while!
Since Time concerns him not about our hopes, —
To save them, — but his own work done, flies off.
Witness myself, looked up to among men,
Doing noteworthy deeds: when here comes fate
Lifts me away, like feather skyward borne,
In one day! Riches then and glory, — whom
These are found constant to, I know not. Friends,
Farewell! the man who loved you all so much,
Now, this last time, my mates, ye look upon!

MEGARA

Ha!
O father, do I see my dearest? Speak!

AMPHITRUON

No more than thou canst, daughter — dumb like thee!

MEGARA

Is this he whom we heard was under ground?

AMPHITRUON

Unless at least some dream in day we see!

MEGARA

What do I say? what dreams insanely view?
This is no other than thy son, old sire!
Here children! hang to these paternal robes,
Quick, haste, hold hard on him, since here 's your true
Zeus that can save — and every whit as well!

HERAKLES

O hail, my palace, my hearth's propula, —
How glad I see thee as I come to light!
Ha, what means this? My children I behold 580
Before the house in garments of the grave,
Chapleted, and, amid a crowd of men,
My very wife — my father weeping too,
Whatever the misfortune! Come, best take
My station nearer these and learn it all!
Wife, what new sorrow has approached our home?

MEGARA

O dearest! light flashed on thy father now!
Art thou come? art thou saved and dost thou fall
On friends in their supreme extremity? 589

HERAKLES

How say'st thou? Father, what 's the trouble here?

MEGARA

Undone are we! — but thou, old man, forgive
If first I snatch what thou shouldst say to him!

For somehow womanhood wakes pity more.
Here are my children killed and I undone!

HERAKLES

Apollon, with what preludes speech begins!

MEGARA

Dead are my brothers and old father too.

HERAKLES

How say'st thou? — doing what? — by spear-stroke whence?

MEGARA

Lukos destroyed them — the land's noble king!

HERAKLES

Met them in arms? or through the land's disease?

MEGARA

Sedition: and he sways seven-gated Thebes. 600

HERAKLES

Why then came fear on the old man and thee?

MEGARA

He meant to kill thy father, me, our boys.

HERAKLES

How say'st thou? Fearing what from orphanage?

MEGARA

Lest they should some day pay back Kreon's death.

HERAKLES

And why trick out the boys corpse-fashion thus?

MEGARA

These wraps of death we have already donned.

HERAKLES

And you had died through violence? Woe 's me!

MEGARA

Left bare of friends: and thou wast dead, we heard.

HERAKLES

And whence came on you this faintheartedness?

MEGARA

The heralds of Eurustheus brought the news.

HERAKLES

And why was it you left my house and hearth?

MEGARA

Forced thence; thy father — from his very couch!

HERAKLES

And no shame at insulting the old man?

MEGARA

Shame, truly! no near neighbors *he* and Shame!

HERAKLES

And so much, in my absence, lacked I friends?

MEGARA

Friends, — are there any to a luckless man?

HERAKLES

The Minuai-war I waged, — they spat forth these?

MEGARA

Friendless, — again I tell thee, — is ill-luck.

HERAKLES

Will not you cast these hell-wraps from your hair
And look on light again, and with your eyes
Taste the sweet change from nether dark to day?
While I — for now there needs my handiwork —
First I shall go, demolish the abodes
Of these new lordships; next hew off the head
Accurst and toss it for the dogs to trail.
Then, such of the Kadmeians as I find
Were craven though they owed me gratitude, —
Some I intend to handle with this club
Renowned for conquest; and with winged shafts
Scatter the others, fill Ismenos full
With bloody corpses, — Dirké's flow so white
Shall be incarnadined. For, whom, I pray,
Behoves me rather help than wife and child
And aged father? Farewell, "Labors" mine!
Vainly I wrought them: my true work lay here!
My business is to die defending these, —
If for their father's sake, they meant to die.
Or how shall we call brave the battling it
With snake and lion, as Eurustheus bade,
If yet I must not labor death away
From my own children? "Conquering Herakles"

Folk will not call me as they used, I think!
The right thing is for parents to assist
Children, old age, the partner of the couch.

AMPHITRUON

True, son! thy duty is — be friend to friends
And foe to foes: yet — no more haste than needs!

HERAKLES

Why, father, what is over hasty here?

AMPHITRUON

Many a pauper, — seeming to be rich,
As the world goes, — the king calls partisan.
Such made a riot, ruined Thebes to rob
Their neighbor: for, what good they had at home
Was spent and gone — flew off through idleness.
You came to trouble Thebes, they saw: since seen,
Beware lest, raising foes, a multitude,
You stumble where you apprehend no harm.

HERAKLES

If all Thebes saw me, not a whit care I.
But seeing as I did a certain bird
Not in the lucky seats, I knew some woe
Was fallen upon the house: so, purposely,
By stealth I made my way into the land.

AMPHITRUON

And now, advancing, hail the hearth with praise
And give the ancestral home thine eye to see!
For he himself will come, thy wife and sons
To drag-forth — slaughter — slay me too, — this king!

But, here remaining, all succeeds with thee —
Gain lost by no false step. So, this thy town
Disturb not, son, ere thou right matters here!

HERAKLES

Thus will I do, for thou say'st well: my home
Let me first enter! Since at the due time
Returning from the unsunned depths where dwells
Haides' wife Korê, let me not affront
Those gods beneath my roof I first should hail

AMPHITRUON

For didst thou really visit Haides, son?

HERAKLES

Ay — dragged to light, too, his three-headed beast.

AMPHITRUON

By fight didst conquer, or through Korê's gift?

HERAKLES

Fight: well for me, I saw the Orgies first!

AMPHITRUON

And is he in Eurustheus' house, the brute?

HERAKLES

Chthonia's grove, Hermion's city, hold him now.

AMPHITRUON

Does not Eurustheus know thee back on earth?

HERAKLES

No: I would come first and see matters here.

AMPHITRUON

But how wast thou below ground such a time?

HERAKLES

I stopped, from Haides, bringing Theseus up.

AMPHITRUON

And where is he? — bound o'er the plain for home?

HERAKLES

Gone glad to Athens — Haides' fugitive!
But, up, boys! follow father into house!
There 's a far better going-in for you
Truly, than going-out was! Nay, take heart,
And let the eyes no longer run and run!
And thou, O wife, my own, collect thy soul
Nor tremble now! Leave grasping, all of you,
My garments! I'm not winged, nor fly from friends!
Ah, —
No letting go for these, who all the more
Hang to my garments! Did you foot indeed
The razor's edge? Why, then I 'll carry them —
Take with my hands these small craft up, and tow
Just as a ship would. There! don't fear I shirk
My children's service! this way, men are men,
No difference! best and worst, they love their boys
After one fashion: wealth they differ in —
Some have it, others not; but each and all
Combine to form the children-loving race.

CHOROS

Youth is a pleasant burthen to me;
But age on my head, more heavily

Than the crags of Aitna, weighs and weighs,
And darkening cloaks the lids and intercepts the rays.
Never be mine the preference
Of an Asian empire's wealth, nor yet
Of a house all gold, to youth, to youth
That 's beauty, whatever the gods dispense!
Whether in wealth we joy, or fret
Paupers, — of all God's gifts most beautiful, in truth!
But miserable murderous age I hate!
Let it go to wreck, the waves adown,
Nor ever by rights plague tower or town
Where mortals bide, but still elate
With wings, on ether, precipitate,
Wander them round — nor wait!

But if the gods, to man's degree,
Had wit and wisdom, they would bring
Mankind a twofold youth, to be
Their virtue's sign-mark, all should see,
In those with whom life's winter thus grew spring.
For when they died, into the sun once more
Would they have traversed twice life's race-course o'er;
While ignobility had simply run
Existence through, nor second life begun.
And so might we discern both bad and good
As surely as the starry multitude
Is numbered by the sailors, one and one.
But now the gods by no apparent line
Limit the worthy and the base define;
Only, a certain period rounds, and so
Brings man more wealth, — but youthful vigor, no!

Well! I am not to pause
Mingling together — wine and wine in cup —

The Graces with the Muses up —
Most dulcet marriage: loosed from music's laws,
No life for me!
But where the wreaths abound, there ever may I be
And still, an aged bard, I shout Mnemosuné —
Still chant of Herakles the triumph-chant,
Companioned by the seven-stringed tortoise-shell
And Libuan flute, and Bromios' self as well,
God of the grape, with man participant!
Not yet will we arrest their glad advance —
The Muses who so long have led me forth to dance!
A paian — hymn the Delian girls indeed,
Weaving a beauteous measure in and out
His temple-gates, Latona's goodly seed;
And paians — I too, these thy domes about,
From these gray cheeks, my king, will swanlike shout —
Old songster! Ay, in song it starts off brave
"Zeus' son is he!" and yet, such grace of birth
Surpassing far, to man his labors gave
Existence, one calm flow without a wave,
Having destroyed the beasts, the terrors of the earth.

LUKOS

From out the house Amphitruon comes — in time!
For 't is a long while now since ye bedecked
Your bodies with the dead-folk's finery.
But quick! the boys and wife of Herakles —
Bid them appear outside this house, keep pact
To die, and need no bidding but your own!

AMPHITRUON

King! you press hard on me sore-pressed enough,
And give me scorn — beside my dead ones here.

Meet in such matters were it, though you reign,
To temper zeal with moderation. Since
You do impose on us the need to die —
Needs must we love our lot, obey your will.

LUKOS

Where 's Megara, then? Alkmenê's grandsons, where? 770

AMPHITRUON

She, I think, — as one figures from outside,

LUKOS

Well, this same thinking, — what affords its ground?

AMPHITRUON

— Sits suppliant on the holy altar-steps, —

LUKOS

Idly indeed a suppliant to save life!

AMPHITRUON

— And calls on her dead husband, vainly too!

LUKOS

For he 's not come, nor ever will arrive.

AMPHITRUON

Never — at least, if no god raise him up.

LUKOS

Go to her, and conduct her from the house!

AMPHITRUON

I should partake the murder, doing that.

LUKOS

We, — since thou hast a scruple in the case, —
Outside of fears, we shall march forth these lads,
Mother and all. Here, follow me, my folk —
And gladly so remove what stops our toils!

AMPHITRUON

Thou — go then! March where needs must! What remains —
Perhaps concerns another. Doing ill,
Except some ill be done thee!
Ha, old friends!
On he strides beautifully! in the toils
O' the net, where swords spring forth, will he be fast —
Minded to kill his neighbors — the arch-knave!
I go, too — I must see the falling corpse!
For he has sweets to give — a dying man,
Your foe, that pays the price of deeds he did.

CHOROS

Troubles are over! He the great king once
Turns the point, tends for Haides, goal of life!
O justice, and the gods' back-flowing fate!

AMPHITRUON

Thou art come, late indeed, where death pays crime —
These insults heaped on better than thyself!

CHOROS

Joy gives this outburst to my tears! Again
Come round those deeds, his doing, which of old

He never dreamed himself was to endure —
King of the country! But enough, old man!
Indoors, now, let us see how matters stand —
If somebody be faring as I wish!

LUKOS

Ah me — me!

CHOROS

This strikes the keynote — music to my mind,
Merry i' the household! Death takes up the tune!
The king gives voice, groans murder's prelude well!

LUKOS

O, all the land of Kadmos! slain by guile!

CHOROS

Ay, for who slew first? Paying back thy due,
Resign thee! make, for deeds done, mere amends!
Who was it grazed the gods through lawlessness —
Mortal himself, threw up his fool's-conceit
Against the blessed heavenly ones — as though
Gods had no power? Old friends, the impious man
Exists not any more! The house is mute.
Turn we to song and dance! For, those I love,
Those I wish well to, well fare they, to wish!

Dances, dances and banqueting
To Thebes, the sacred city through,
Are a care! for, change and change
Of tears to laughter, old to new,
Our lays, glad birth, they bring, they bring!
He is gone and past, the mighty king!
And the old one reigns, returned — O strange!
From the Acherontian harbor too!

Advent of hope, beyond thought's widest range!
To the gods, the gods, are crimes a care,
And they watch our virtue, well aware
That gold and that prosperity drive man
Out of his mind — those charioteers who hale
Might-without-right behind them: face who can
Fortune's reverse which time prepares, nor quail?
— He who evades law and in lawlessness
Delights him, — he has broken down his trust —
The chariot, riches haled — now blackening in the dust!

Ismenos, go thou garlanded!
Break into dance, ye ways, the polished bed
O' the seven-gated city? Dirkê, thou
Fair-flowing, with the Asopiad sisters all,
Leave your sire's stream, attend the festival
Of Herakles, one choir of nymphs, sing triumph now!
O woody rock of Puthios and each home
O' the Helikonian Muses, ye shall come
With joyous shouting to my walls, my town
Where saw the light that Spartan race, those "Sown,"
Brazen-shield-bearing chiefs, whereof the band
With children's children renovates our land,
To Thebes a sacred light!
O combination of the marriage rite —
Bed of the mortal-born and Zeus, who couched
Beside the nymph of Perseus' progeny!
For credible, past hope, becomes to me
That nuptial story long ago avouched,
O Zeus! and time has turned the dark to bright,
And made one blaze of truth the Herakleidan might —
His, who emerged from earth's pavilion, left
Plouton's abode, the nether palace-cleft.

Thou wast the lord that nature gave me — not
That baseness born and bred — my king, by lot!
— Baseness made plain to all, who now regard
The match of sword with sword in fight, —
If to the gods the Just and Right
Still pleasing be, still claim the palm's award.

Horror!
Are we come to the self-same passion of fear,
Old friends? — such a phantasm fronts me here
Visible over the palace-roof!
In flight, in flight, the laggard limb
Bestir! and haste aloof
From that on the roof there — grand and grim!
O Paian, king!
Be thou my safeguard from the woful thing!

IRIS

Courage, old men! beholding here — Night's birth —
Madness, and me the handmaid of the gods,
Iris: since to your town we come, no plague —
Wage war against the house of but one man
From Zeus and from Alkmené sprung, they say.
Now, till he made an end of bitter toils,
Fate kept him safe, nor did his father Zeus
Let us once hurt him, Heré nor myself.
But, since he has toiled through Eurustheus' task,
Heré desires to fix fresh blood on him —
Slaying his children: I desire it too.

Up then, collecting the unsoftened heart,
Unwedded virgin of black Night! Drive, drag
Frenzy upon the man here — whirls of brain
Big with child-murder, while his feet leap gay!
Let go the bloody cable its whole length!

So that, — when o'er the Acherousian ford
He has sent floating, by self-homicide,
His beautiful boy-garland, — he may know
First, Heré's anger, what it is to him,
And then learn mine. The gods are vile indeed
And mortal matters vast, if he 'scape free!

MADNESS

Certes, from well-born sire and mother too
Had I my birth, whose blood is Night's and Heaven's;
But here 's my glory, — not to grudge the good!
Nor love I raids against the friends of man.
I wish, then, to persuade, — before I see
You stumbling, you and Heré! trust my words!
This man, the house of whom ye hound me to,
Is not unfamed on earth nor gods among;
Since, having quelled waste land and savage sea,
He alone raised again the falling rights
Of gods — gone ruinous through impious men.
Desire no mighty mischief, I advise!

IRIS

Give thou no thought to Heré's faulty schemes!

MADNESS

Changing her step from faulty to fault-free!

IRIS

Not to be wise, did Zeus' wife send thee here.

MADNESS

Sun, thee I cite to witness — doing what I loathe to do!
But since indeed to Heré and thyself I must subserve,

And follow you quick, with a whizz, as the hounds
a-hunt with the huntsman,
— Go I will! and neither the sea, as it groans with
its waves so furiously,
Nor earthquake, no, nor the bolt of thunder gasping
out heaven's labor-throe,
Shall cover the ground as I, at a bound, rush into the
bosom of Herakles!
And home I scatter, and house I batter,
Having first of all made the children fall, —
And he who felled them is never to know
He gave birth to each child that received the blow,
Till the Madness, I am, have let him go!

Ha, behold! already he rocks his head — he is off
from the starting-place!
Not a word, as he rolls his frightful orbs, from their
sockets wrenched in the ghastly race!
And the breathings of him he tempers and times no
more than a bull in act to toss,
And hideously he bellows invoking the Keres,
daughters of Tartaros.
Ay, and I soon will dance thee madder, and pipe thee
quite out of thy mind with fear!
So, up with the famous foot, thou Iris, march to
Olumpos, leave me here!
Me and mine, who now combine, in the dreadful
shape no mortal sees,
And now are about to pass, from without, inside of
the home of Herakles!

CHOROS

Otototoi, — groan!
Away is mown
Thy flower, Zeus' offspring, City!

Unhappy Hellas, who dost cast (the pity!)
Who worked thee all the good,
Away from thee, — destroyest in a mood
Of madness him, to death whom pipings dance!
There goes she, in her chariot, — groans, her brood,
And gives her team the goad, as though adrift
For doom, Night's Gorgon, Madness, she whose glance
Turns man to marble! with what hissings lift
Their hundred heads the snakes, her head's inheritance!
Quick has the god changed fortune: through their sire
Quick will the children, that he saved, expire!
O miserable me! O Zeus! thy child —
Childless himself — soon vengeance, hunger-wild,
Craving for punishment, will lay how low —
Loaded with many a woe!

O palace-roofs! your courts about,
A measure begins all unrejoiced
By the tympanies and the thyrsos hoist
Of the Bromian revel-rout!
O ye domes! and the measure proceeds
For blood, not such as the cluster bleeds
Of the Dionusian pouring-out!

Break forth, fly, children! fatal this —
Fatal the lay that is piped, I wis!
Ay, for he hunts a children-chase —
Never shall Madness lead her revel
And leave no trace in the dwelling-place!
Ai ai, because of the evil!
Ai ai, the old man — how I groan
For the father, and not the father alone!

She who was nurse of his children, — small
Her gain that they ever were born at all!

See! See!
A whirlwind shakes hither and thither
The house — the roof falls in together!
Ha, ha, what dost thou, son of Zeus?
A trouble of Tartaros broke loose,
Such as once Pallas on the Titan thundered,
Thou sendest on thy domes, roof-shattered and wall-sundered!

MESSENGER

O bodies white with age! —

CHOROS

What cry, to me —
*What*, dost thou call with?

MESSENGER

There 's a curse indoors.

CHOROS

I shall not bring a prophet: you suffice.

MESSENGER

Dead are the children.

CHOROS

Ai ai!

MESSENGER

Groan! for, groans
Suit well the subject. Dire the children's death,

Dire too the parent's hands that dealt the fate.
No one could tell worse woe than we have borne.

CHOROS

How dost thou that same curse — curse, cause for
groan —
The father's on the children, make appear?
Tell in what matter they were hurled from heaven
Against the house — these evils; and recount
The children's hapless fate, O Messenger!

MESSENGER

The victims were before the hearth of Zeus,
A household-expiation: since the king
O' the country, Herakles had killed and cast
From out the dwelling; and a beauteous choir
Of boys stood by his sire, too, and his wife.
And now the basket had been carried round
The altar in a circle, and we used
The consecrated speech. Alkmenê's son, —
Just as he was about, in his right hand,
To bear the torch, that he might dip into
The cleansing-water, — came to a stand-still;
And, as their father yet delayed, his boys
Had their eyes on him. But he was himself
No longer: lost in rollings of the eyes;
Outthrusting eyes — their very roots — like blood!
Froth he dropped down his bushy-bearded cheek,
And said — together with a madman's laugh —
"Father! why sacrifice, before I slay
Eurustheus? why have twice the lustral fire,
And double pains, when 't is permitted me
To end, with one good hand-sweep, matters here?
Then, — when I hither bring Eurustheus' head, —
Then for these just slain, wash hands once for all!

Now, — cast drink-offerings forth, throw baskets down!
Who gives me bow and arrows, who my club?
I go to that Mukenai. One must match
Crowbars and mattocks, so that — those sunk stones
The Kuklops squared with picks and plumb-line red —
I, with my bent steel, may o'ertumble town."
Which said, he goes and — with no car to have —
Affirms he has one! mounts the chariot-board,
And strikes, as having really goad in hand!
And two ways laughed the servants — laugh with awe;
And one said, as each met the other's stare,
"Playing us boys' tricks? or is master mad?"
But up he climbs, and down along the roof,
And, dropping into the men's place, maintains
He 's come to Nisos city, when he 's come
Only inside his own house! then reclines
On floor, for couch, and, as arrived indeed,
Makes himself supper; goes through some brief stay,
Then says he 's traversing the forest-flats
Of Isthmos; thereupon lays body bare
Of bucklings, and begins a contest with
— No one! and is proclaimed the conqueror —
He by himself — having called out to hear
— Nobody! Then, if you will take his word,
Blaring against Eurustheus horribly,
He 's at Mukenai. But his father laid
Hold of the strong hand and addressed him thus:
"O son, what ails thee? Of what sort is this
Extravagance? Has not some murder-craze,
Bred of those corpses thou didst just despatch,
Danced thee drunk?" But he, — taking him to crouch,

Eurustheus' sire, that apprehensive touched
His hand, a suppliant, — pushes him aside,
Gets ready quiver, and bends bow against
His children — thinking them Eurustheus' boys
He means to slay. They, horrified with fear,
Rushed here and there, — this child, into the robes
O' the wretched mother — this, beneath the shade
O' the column, — and this other, like a bird,
Cowered at the altar-foot. The mother shrieks
"Parent — what dost thou? — kill thy children?"
So
Shriek the old sire and crowd of servitors.
But he, outwinding him, as round about
The column ran the boy, — a horrid whirl
O' the lathe his foot described! — stands opposite,
Strikes through the liver; and supine the boy
Bedews the stone shafts, breathing out his life.
But "Victory!" he shouted — boasted thus:
"Well, this one nestling of Eurustheus — dead —
Falls by me, pays back the paternal hate!"
Then bends bow on another who was crouched
At base of altar — overlooked, he thought —
And now prevents him, falls at father's knee,
Throwing up hand to beard and cheek above.
"O dearest!" cries he; "father, kill me not!
Yours I am — your boy: not Eurustheus' boy
You kill now!" But he, rolling the wild eye
Of Gorgon, — as the boy stood all too close
For deadly bowshot, — mimicry of smith
Who batters red-hot iron, — hand o'er head
Heaving his club, on the boy's yellow hair
Hurls it and breaks the bone. This second caught, —
He goes, would slay the third, one sacrifice
He and the couple; but, beforehand here,
The miserable mother catches up,

Carries him inside house and bars the gate.
Then he, as he were at those Kuklops' work,
Digs at, heaves doors up, wrenchs doorposts out,
Lays wife and child low with the selfsame shaft.
And this done, at the old man's death he drives;
But there came, as it seemed to us who saw,
A statue — Pallas with the crested head,
Swinging her spear — and threw a stone which smote
Herakles' breast and stayed his slaughter-rage,
And sent him safe to sleep. He falls to ground —
Striking against the column with his back —
Column which, with the falling of the roof,
Broken in two, lay by the altar-base.
And we, foot-free now from our several flights,
Along with the old man, we fastened bonds
Of rope-noose to the column, so that he,
Ceasing from sleep, might not go adding deeds
To deeds done. And he sleeps a sleep, poor wretch,
No gift of any god! since he has slain
Children and wife. For me, I do not know
What mortal has more misery to bear.

CHOROS

A murder there was which Argolis
Holds in remembrance, Hellas through,
As, at that time, best and famousest:
Of those, the daughters of Danaos slew.
A murder indeed was that! but this
Outstrips it, straight to the goal has pressed.
I am able to speak of a murder done
To the hapless Zeus-born offspring, too —
Prokné's son, who had but one —
Or a sacrifice to the Muses, say
Rather, who Itus sing alway,

Her single child. But thou, the sire
Of children three — O thou consuming fire! —
In one outrageous fate hast made them all expire.
And this outrageous fate —
What groan, or wail, or deadmen's dirge,
Or choric dance of Haides shall I urge
The Muse to celebrate?

Woe! woe! behold!
The portalled palace lies unrolled,
This way and that way, each prodigious fold!
Alas for me! these children, see,
Stretched, hapless group, before their father — he
The all-unhappy, who lies sleeping out
The murder of his sons, a dreadful sleep!
And bonds, see, all about, —
Rope-tangle, ties and tether, — these
Tightenings around the body of Herakles
To the stone columns of the house made fast!

But — like a bird that grieves
For callow nestlings some rude hand bereaves —
See, here, a bitter journey overpast,
The old man — all too late — is here at last!

AMPHITRUON

Silently, silently, aged Kadmeians!
Will ye not suffer my son, diffused
Yonder, to slide from his sorrows in sleep?

CHOROS

And thee, old man, do I, groaning, weep,
And the children too, and the head there — used
Of old to the wreaths and paians!

AMPHITRUON

Farther away! Nor beat the breast,
Nor wail aloud, nor rouse from rest
The slumberer — asleep, so best!

CHOROS

Ah me — what a slaughter!

AMPHITRUON

Refrain — refrain!
Ye will prove my perdition.

CHOROS

Unlike water,
Bloodshed rises from earth again.

AMPHITRUON

Do I bid you bate your breath, in vain —
Ye elders? Lament in a softer strain!
Lest he rouse himself, burst every chain,
And bury the city in ravage — bray
Father and house to dust away!

CHOROS

I cannot forbear — I cannot forbear!

AMPHITRUON

Hush! I will learn his breathings: there!
I will lay my ears close.

CHOROS

What, he sleeps?

AMPHITRUON

Ay, — sleeps! A horror of slumber keeps
The man who has piled
On wife and child
Death and death, as he shot them down
With clang o' the bow.

CHOROS

Wail —

AMPHITRUON

Even so!

CHOROS

— The fate of the children —

AMPHITRUON

Triple woe!

CHOROS

— Old man, the fate of thy son!

AMPHITRUON

Hush, hush! Have done!
He is turning about!
He is breaking out!
Away! I steal
And my body conceal,
Before he arouse,
In the depths of the house.

CHOROS

Courage! The Night!
Maintains her right
On the lids of thy son there, sealed from sight!

AMPHITRUON

See, see! To leave the light
And, wretch that I am, bear one last ill,
I do not avoid; but if he kill
Me his own father, and devise
Beyond the present miseries
A misery more ghastly still —
And to haunt him, over and above
Those here who, as they used to love,
Now hate him, what if he have with these
My murder, the worst of Erinues?

CHOROS

Then was the time to die, for thee,
When ready to wreak in the full degree
Vengeance on those
Thy consort's foes
Who murdered her brothers! glad, life's close,
With the Taphioi down,
And sacked their town
Clustered about with a wash of sea!

AMPHITRUON

To flight — to flight!
Away from the house, troop off, old men!
Save yourselves out of the maniac's sight!
He is rousing himself right up: and then,
Murder on murder heaping anew,
He will revel in blood your city through!

CHOROS

O Zeus, why hast, with such unmeasured hate,
Hated thy son, whelmed in this sea of woes?

HERAKLES

Ha, —
In breath indeed I am — see things I ought —
Æther, and earth, and these the sunbeam-shafts!
But then — some billow and strange whirl of sense
I have fallen into! and breathings hot I breathe —
Smoked upwards, not the steady work from lungs.
See now! Why bound, — at moorings like a ship, —
About my young breast and young arm, to this
Stone piece of carved work broke in half, do I
Sit, have my rest in corpses' neighborhood?
Strewn on the ground are winged darts, and bow
Which played my brother-shieldman, held in hand, —
Guarded my side, and got my guardianship!
I cannot have gone back to Haides — twice
Begun Eurustheus' race I ended thence?
But I nor see the Sisupheian stone,
Nor Plouton, nor Demeter's sceptred maid!
I am struck witless sure! Where can I be?
Ho there! what friend of mine is near or far —
Some one to cure me of bewilderment?
For naught familiar do I recognize.

AMPHITRUON

Old friends, shall I go close to these my woes?

CHOROS

Ay, and let me too, — nor desert your ills!

HERAKLES

Father, why weepest thou, and buriest up
Thine eyes, aloof so from thy much-loved son?

AMPHITRUON

O child! — for, faring badly, mine thou art!

HERAKLES

Do I fare somehow ill, that tears should flow?

AMPHITRUON

Ill, — would cause any god who bore, to groan!

HERAKLES

That 's boasting, truly! still, you state no hap.

AMPHITRUON

For, thyself seest — if in thy wits again.

HERAKLES

Heyday! How riddingly that hint returns!

AMPHITRUON

Well, I am trying — art thou sane and sound! 1219

HERAKLES

Say if thou lay'st aught strange to my life's charge!

AMPHITRUON

If thou no more art Haides-drunk, — I tell!

HERAKLES

I bring to mind no drunkenness of soul.

AMPHITRUON

Shall I unbind my son, old men, or what?

HERAKLES

And who was binder, tell! — not *that*, my deed!

AMPHITRUON

Mind that much of misfortune — pass the rest!

HERAKLES

Enough! from silence, I nor learn nor wish.

AMPHITRUON

O Zeus, dost witness here throned Heré's work?

HERAKLES

But have I had to bear aught hostile thence?

AMPHITRUON

Let be the goddess — bury thine own guilt!

HERAKLES

Undone! What is the sorrow thou wilt say? 1230

AMPHITRUON

Look! See the ruins of thy children here!

HERAKLES

Ah me! What sight do wretched I behold?

AMPHITRUON

Unfair fight, son, this fight thou fastenedst
On thine own children!

HERAKLES

What fight? Who slew these!

AMPHITRUON

Thou and thy bow, and who of gods was cause.

HERAKLES

How say'st? What did I? Ill-announcing sire!

AMPHITRUON

— Go mad! Thou askest a sad clearing up.

HERAKLES

And am I also murderer of my wife?

AMPHITRUON

All the work here was just one hand's work — thine!

HERAKLES

Ai ai — for groans encompass me — a cloud! 1240

AMPHITRUON

For these deeds' sake do I begroan thy fate.

HERAKLES

Did I break up my house or dance it down?

AMPHITRUON

I know just one thing — all 's a woe with thee.

HERAKLES

But where did the craze catch me? where destroy?

AMPHITRUON

When thou didst cleanse hands at the altar-flame.

HERAKLES

Ah me! why is it then I save my life —
Proved murderer of my dearest ones, my boys?
Shall not I rush to the rock-level's leap,
Or, darting sword through breast and all, become
My children's blood-avenger? or, this flesh
Burning away with fire, so thrust away
The infamy, which waits me there, from life?

Ah but, — hindrance to my purposed death,
Theseus arrives, my friend and kinsman, here!
Eyes will be on me! my child-murder-plague
In evidence before friends loved so much!
O me, what shall I do? Where, taking wing
Or gliding underground, shall I seek out
A solitariness from misery?
I will pull night upon my muffled head!
Let this wretch here content him with his curse
Of blood: I would pollute no innocents.

THESEUS

I come, — with others who await beside
Asopos' stream, the armed Athenian youth, —
Bring thy son, old man, spear's fight-fellowship!
For a bruit reached the Erechtheidai's town
That, having seized the sceptre of this realm,
Lukos prepares you battle-violence.
So, paying good back, — Herakles began,
Saving me down there, — I have come, old man,
If aught, of my hand or my friends', you want.
What 's here? Why all these corpses on the ground?

Am I perhaps behindhand — come too late
For newer ill? Who killed these children now?
Whose wife was she, this woman I behold?
Boys, at least, take no stand in reach of spear!
Some other woe than war, I chance upon.

AMPHITRUON

O thou, who sway'st the olive-bearing height! —

THESEUS

Why hail'st thou me with woful prelude thus?

AMPHITRUON

Dire sufferings have we suffered from the gods.

THESEUS

These boys, — who are they thou art weeping o'er?

AMPHITRUON

He gave them birth, indeed, my hapless son!
Begot, but killed them — dared their bloody death.

THESEUS

Speak no such horror!

AMPHITRUON

Would I might obey!

THESEUS

O teller of dread tidings!

AMPHITRUON

Lost are we —
Lost — flown away from life!

THESEUS

What sayest thou?
What did he?

AMPHITRUON

Erring through a frenzy-fit,
He did all, with the arrows dipt in dye
Of hundred-headed Hudra.

THESEUS

Heré's strife!
But who is this among the dead, old man?

AMPHITRUON

Mine, mine, this progeny — the labor-plagued,
Who went with gods once to Phlegruia's plain,
And in the giant-slaying war bore shield.

THESEUS

Woe — woe! What man was born mischanceful thus!

AMPHITRUON

Thou couldst not know another mortal man
Toil-weary, more outworn by wanderings.

THESEUS

And why i' the peploi hides he his sad head!

AMPHITRUON

Not daring meet thine eye, thy friendliness
And kinship, — nor that children's-blood about.

THESEUS

But *I* come to who shared my woe with me!
Uncover him!

AMPHITRUON

O child, put from thine eyes
The peplos, throw it off, show face to sun!
Woe's weight well matched contends with tears in thee.
I supplicate thee, falling at thy cheek
And knee and hand, and shedding this old tear!
O son, remit the savage lion's mood,
Since to a bloody, an unholy race
Art thou led forth, if thou be resolute
To go on adding ill to ill, my child!

THESEUS

Let me speak! Thee, who sittest — seated woe —
I call upon to show thy friends thine eye!
For there 's no darkness has a cloud so black
May hide thy misery thus absolute.
Why, waving hand, dost sign me — murder 's done?
Lest a pollution strike me, from thy speech?
Naught care I to — with thee, at least — fare ill:
For I had joy once! *Then*, — soul rises to, —
When thou didst save me from the dead to light!
Friends' gratitude that tastes old age, I loathe,
And him who likes to share when things look fine,
But, sail along with friends in trouble — no!
Arise, uncover thine unhappy head!
Look on us! Every man of the right race
Bears what, at least, the gods inflict, nor shrinks.

HERAKLES

Theseus, hast seen this match — my boys with me?

THESEUS

I heard of, now I see the ills thou sign'st.

HERAKLES

Why then hast thou displayed my head to sun?

THESEUS

Why? mortals bring no plague on aught divine.

HERAKLES

Fly, O unhappy, this my impious plague! 1329

THESEUS

No plague of vengeance flits to friends from friends.

HERAKLES

I praise thee. But I helped thee, — that is truth.

THESEUS

And I, advantaged then, now pity thee.

HERAKLES

— The pitiable, — my children's murderer!

THESEUS

I mourn for thy sake, in this altered lot.

HERAKLES

Hast thou found others in still greater woe?

THESEUS

Thou, from earth, touchest heaven, one huge distress!

HERAKLES

Accordingly, I am prepared to die.

THESEUS

Think'st thou thy threats at all import the gods?

HERAKLES

Gods please themselves: to gods I give their like.

THESEUS

Shut thy mouth, lest big words bring bigger woe!

HERAKLES

I am full fraught with ills — no stowing more! 1341

THESEUS

Thou wilt do — what, then? Whither moody borne?

HERAKLES

Dying, I go below earth whence I came.

THESEUS

Thou hast used words of — what man turns up first!

HERAKLES

While thou, being outside sorrow, schoolest me.

THESEUS

The much-enduring Herakles talks thus? —

HERAKLES

Not the so much-enduring: measure 's past.

THESEUS

— Mainstay to mortals, and their mighty friend?

HERAKLES

They nowise profit me: but Heré rules.

THESEUS

Hellas forbids thou shouldst ineptly die.

HERAKLES

But hear, then, how I strive by arguments
Against thy teachings! I will ope thee out
My life — past, present — as unlivable.
First, I was born of this man, who had slain
His mother's aged sire, and, sullied so,
Married Alkmené, she who gave me birth.
Now, when the basis of a family
Is not laid right, what follows needs must fall;
And Zeus, whoever Zeus is, formed me foe
To Heré (take not thou offence, old man!
Since father, in Zeus' stead, account I thee),
And, while I was at suck yet, frightful snakes
She introduced among my swaddling-clothes, —
That bedfellow of Zeus! — to end me so.
But when I gained the youthful garb of flesh,
The labors I endured — what need to tell?
What lions ever, or three-bodied brutes,
Tuphons or giants, or the four-legg'd swarms
Of Kentaur-battle, did not I end out?
And that hound, headed all about with heads
Which cropped up twice, the Hudra, having slain —
I both went through a myriad other toils
In full drove, and arrived among the dead
To convoy, as Eurustheus bade, to light
Haides' three-headed dog and doorkeeper.

But then I, — wretch, — dared this last labor — see!
Slew my sons, keystone-coped my house with ills.
To such a strait I come! nor my dear Thebes
Dare I inhabit: and, suppose I stay?
Into what fane or festival of friends
Am I to go? My curse scarce courts accost!
Shall I seek Argos? How, if fled from home?
But say — I hurry to some other town!
And there they eye me, as notorious now, —
Kept by sharp tongue-taunts under lock and key —
"Is not this he, Zeus' son, who murdered once
Children and wife? Let him go rot elsewhere!"
To any man renowned as happy once,
Reverses are a grave thing; but to whom
Evil is old acquaintance there 's no hurt
To speak of, he and misery are twins.
To this degree of woe I think to come:
For earth will utter voice forbidding me
To touch the ground, and sea — to pierce the wave,
The river-springs — to drink, and I shall play
Ixion's part quite out, the chained and wheeled!
And best of all will be, if so I 'scape
Sight from one man of those Hellenes, — once
I lived among, felicitous and rich!
Why ought I then to live? What gain accrues
From good-for-nothing, wicked life I lead?
In fine, let Zeus' brave consort dance and sing,
Stamp foot, the Olumpian Zeus' own sandal-trick!
What she has willed, that brings her will to pass —
The foremost man of Hellas pedestalled,
Up, over, and down whirling! Who would pray
To such a goddess? — that, begrudging Zeus
Because he loved a woman, ruins me —
Lover of Hellas, faultless of the wrong!

THESEUS

This strife is from no other of the gods
Than Zeus' wife; rightly apprehend, as well,
Why, to no death — thou meditatest now —
I would persuade thee, but to bear thy woes!
None, none of mortals boasts a fate unmixed,
Nor gods — if poets' teaching be not false.
Have not they joined in wedlock against law
With one another? not, for sake of rule,
Branded their sires in bondage? Yet they house,
All the same, in Olumpos, carry heads
High there, notorious sinners though they be!
What wilt thou say, then, if thou, mortal-born,
Bearest outrageously fate gods endure?
Leave Thebes, now, pay obedience to the law
And follow me to Pallas' citadel!
There, when thy hands are purified from stain,
House will I give thee, and goods shared alike.
What gifts I hold too from the citizens
For saving twice seven children, when I slew
The Knosian bull, these also give I thee.
And everywhere about the land are plots
Apportioned me: these, named by thine own name,
Shall be henceforward styled by all men — thine,
Thy life long; but at death, when Haides-bound,
All Athens shall uphold the honored one
With sacrifices, and huge marble heaps:
For that 's a fair crown our Hellenes grant
Their people — glory, should they help the brave!
And I repay thee back this grace for thine
That saved me, now that thou art lorn of friends —
Since, when the gods give honor, friends may flit:
For, a god's help suffices, if he please.

HERAKLES

Ah me, these words are foreign to my woes!
I neither fancy gods love lawless beds,
Nor, that with chains they bind each other's hands,
Have I judged worthy faith, at any time;
Nor shall I be persuaded — one is born
His fellows' master! since God stands in need —
If he is really God — of naught at all.
These are the poets' pitiful conceits!
But this it was I pondered, though woe-whelmed —
"Take heed lest thou be taxed with cowardice
Somehow in leaving thus the light of day!"
For whoso cannot make a stand against
These same misfortunes, neither could withstand
A mere man's dart, oppose death, strength to strength.
Therefore unto thy city I will go
And have the grace of thy ten thousand gifts.
There! I have tasted of ten thousand toils
As truly — never waived a single one,
Nor let these runnings drop from out my eyes:
Nor ever thought it would have come to this —
That I from out my eyes do drop tears. Well!
At present, as it seems, one bows to fate.
So be it! Old man, thou seest my exile —
Seest, too, me — my children's murderer!
These give thou to the tomb, and deck the dead,
Doing them honor with thy tears — since me
Law does not sanction. Propping on her breast,
And giving them into their mother's arms,
— Re-institute the sad community
Which I, unhappy, brought to nothingness —
Not by my will! And, when earth hides the dead,
Live in this city! — sad, but all the same,

Force thy soul to bear woe along with me!
O children, who begat and gave you birth —
Your father — has destroyed you! naught you gain
By those fair deeds of mine I laid you up,
As by main-force I labored glory out
To give you, — that fine gift of fatherhood!
And thee, too, O my poor one, I destroyed,
Not rendering like for like, as when thou kept'st
My marriage-bed inviolate, — those long
Household-seclusions draining to the dregs
Inside my house! O me, my wife, my boys —
And — O myself, how, miserably moved,
Am I disyoked now from both boys and wife!
O bitter those delights of kisses now —
And bitter these my weapons' fellowship!
For I am doubtful whether shall I keep
Or cast away these arrows which will clang
Ever such words out, as they knock my side —
"Us — thou didst murder wife and children with!
Us — child-destroyers — still thou keepest thine!"
Ha, shall I bear them in my arms, then? What
Say for excuse? Yet, naked of my darts
Wherewith I did my bravest, Hellas through,
Throwing myself beneath foot to my foes,
Shall I die basely? No! relinquishment
Of these must never be, — companions once,
We sorrowfully must observe the pact.
In just one thing, co-operate with me
Thy sad friend, Theseus! Go along with him
To Argos, and in concert get arranged
The price my due for bringing there the Hound!
O land of Kadmos, Theban people all,
Shear off your locks, lament one wide lament,
Go to my children's grave and, in one strain,
Lament the whole of us — my dead and me —

Since all together are fordone and lost,
Smitten by Heré's single stroke of fate!

THESEUS

Rise up now from thy dead ones! Tears enough,
Poor friend!

HERAKLES

I cannot: for my limbs are fixed.

THESEUS

Ay: even these strong men fate overthrows.

HERAKLES

Woe!
Here might I grow a stone, nor mind woes more!

THESEUS

Cease! Give thy hand to friendly helpmate now!

HERAKLES

Nay, but I wipe off blood upon thy robes.

THESEUS

Squeeze out and spare no drop! I take it all!

HERAKLES

Of sons bereaved, I have thee like my son.

THESEUS

Give to my neck thy hand! 't is I will lead.

HERAKLES

Yoke-fellows friendly — one heart-broken, though!
O father, such a man we need for friend!

AMPHITRUON

Certes the land that bred him boasts good sons.

HERAKLES

Turn me round, Theseus — to behold my boys!

THESEUS

What? will the having such a love-charm soothe?

HERAKLES

I want it; and to press my father's breast.

AMPHITRUON

See here, O son! for, what I love thou seek'st.

THESEUS

Strange! Of thy labors no more memory?

HERAKLES

All those were less than these, those ills I bore. 1529

THESEUS

Who sees thee grow a woman, — will not praise.

HERAKLES

I live low to thee? Not so once, I think.

THESEUS

Too low by far! "Famed Herakles" — where 's he?

HERAKLES

Down amid evils, of what kind wast *thou?*

THESEUS

As far as courage — least of all mankind!

HERAKLES

How say'st, then, *I* in evils shrink to naught?

THESEUS

Forward!

HERAKLES

Farewell, old father!

AMPHITRUON

Thou too, son

HERAKLES

Bury the boys as I enjoined!

AMPHITRUON

And *me* —

Who will be found to bury now, my child?

HERAKLES

Myself.

AMPHITRUON

When, coming?

HERAKLES

When thy task is done

AMPHITRUON

How?

HERAKLES

I will have thee carried forth from Thebes
To Athens. But bear in the children, earth
Is burthened by! Myself, — who with these shames
Have cast away my house, — a ruined hulk,
I follow — trailed by Theseus — on my way;
And whoso rather would have wealth and strength
Than good friends, reasons foolishly therein.

CHOROS

And we depart, with sorrow at heart,
Sobs that increase with tears that start;
The greatest of all our friends of yore
We have lost for evermore!

## CONCLUSION

When the long silence ended, — "Our best friend —
Lost, our best friend!" he muttered musingly.
Then, "Lachares the sculptor" (half aloud)
"Sinned he or sinned he not? 'Outrageous sin!'
Shuddered our elders, 'Pallas should be clothed:
He carved her naked.' 'But more beautiful!'
Answers this generation: 'Wisdom formed
For love not fear!' And there the statue stands,
Entraps the eye severer art repels.
Moreover, Pallas wields the thunderbolt
Yet has not struck the artist all this while.

Pheidias and Aischulos? Euripides
And Lachares? But youth will have its way.
The ripe man ought to be as old as young —
As young as old. I too have youth at need.
Much may be said for stripping wisdom bare.

"And who 's 'our best friend'? You play kottabos;
Here 's the last mode of playing. Take a sphere
With orifices at due interval,
Through topmost one of which, a throw adroit
Sends wine from cup, clean passage, from outside
To where, in hollow midst, a manikin
Suspended ever bobs with head erect
Right underneath whatever hole 's a-top
When you set orb a-rolling: plumb, he gets
Ever this benediction of the splash.
An other-fashioned orb presents him fixed:
Of all the outlets, he fronts only one,
And only when that one, — and rare the chance, —
Comes uppermost, does he turn upward too:
He can't turn all sides with the turning orb.
Inside this sphere of life, — all objects, sense
And soul perceive, — Euripides hangs fixed,
Gets knowledge through the single aperture
Of High and Right: with visage fronting these
He waits the wine thence ere he operate,
Work in the world and write a tragedy.
When that hole happens to revolve to point,
In drops the knowledge, waiting meets reward.
But, duly in rotation, Low and Wrong —
When these enjoy the moment's altitude,
His heels are found just where his head should be!
No knowledge that way! *I* am movable, —
To slightest shift of orb make prompt response,
Face Low and Wrong and Weak and all the rest,

And still drink knowledge, wine-drenched every turn, —
Equally favored by their opposites.
Little and Bad exist, are natural:
Then let me know them, and be twice as great
As he who only knows one phase of life!
So doubly shall I prove 'best friend of man,'
If I report the whole truth — Vice, perceived
While he shut eyes to all but Virtue there.
Man 's made of both: and both must be of use
To somebody: if not to him, to me.
While, as to your imaginary Third
Who, stationed (by mechanics past my guess)
So as to take in every side at once,
And not successively, — may reconcile
The High and Low in tragic-comic verse, —
He shall be hailed superior to us both
When born — in the Tin-islands! Meantime, here
In bright Athenai, I contest the claim,
Call myself Iostephanos' 'best friend,'
Who took my own course, worked as I descried
Ordainment, stuck to my first faculty.

"For listen! There 's no failure breaks the heart,
Whate'er be man's endeavor in this world,
Like the rash poet's when he — nowise fails
By poetizing badly, — Zeus or makes
Or mars a man, so — at it, merrily!
But when, — made man, — much like myself, — equipt
For such and such achievement, — rash he turns
Out of the straight path, bent on snatch of feat
From — who 's the appointed fellow born thereto, —
Crows take him! — in your Kassiterides?
Half-doing his work, leaving mine untouched,

That were the failure. Here I stand, heart-whole,
No Thamuris!

"Well thought of, Thamuris!
Has zeal, pray, for 'best friend' Euripides
Allowed you to observe the honor done
His elder rival, on our Poikilê?
You don't know? Once and only once, trod stage,
Sang and touched lyre in person, in his youth,
Our Sophokles, — youth, beauty, dedicate
To Thamuris who named the tragedy.
The voice of him was weak; face, limbs and lyre,
These were worth saving: Thamuris stands yet
Perfect as painting helps in such a case.
At least you know the story, for 'best friend'
Enriched his 'Rhesos' from the Blind Bard's store;
So haste and see the work, and lay to heart
What it was struck me when I eyed the piece!
Here stands a poet punished for rash strife
With Powers above his power, who see with sight
Beyond his vision, sing accordingly
A song, which he must needs dare emulate.
Poet, remain the man nor ape the Muse!

"But — lend me the psalterion! Nay, for once —
Once let my hand fall where the other's lay!
I see it, just as I were Sophokles,
That sunrise and combustion of the east!"

And then he sang — are these unlike the words?

Thamuris marching, — lyre and song of Thrace —
(Perpend the first, the worst of woes that were
Allotted lyre and song, ye poet-race!)

Thamuris from Oichalia, feasted there
By kingly Eurutos of late, now bound
For Dorion at the uprise broad and bare

Of Mount Pangaios (ore with earth enwound
Glittered beneath his footstep) — marching gay
And glad, Thessalia through, came, robed and crowned,

From triumph on to triumph, mid a ray
Of early morn, — came, saw and knew the spot
Assigned him for his worst of woes, that day.

Balura — happier while its name was not —
Met him, but nowise menaced; slipt aside,
Obsequious river to pursue its lot

Of solacing the valley — say, some wide
Thick busy human cluster, house and home,
Embanked for peace, or thrift that thanks the tide.

Thamuris, marching, laughed "Each flake of foam"
(As sparklingly the ripple raced him by)
"Mocks slower clouds adrift in the blue dome!"

For Autumn was the season; red the sky
Held morn's conclusive signet of the sun
To break the mists up, bid them blaze and die.

Morn had the mastery as, one by one
All pomps produced themselves along the tract
From earth's far ending to near heaven begun.

Was there a ravaged tree? it laughed compact
With gold, a leaf-ball crisp, high-brandished now,
Tempting to onset frost which late attacked.

Was there a wizened shrub, a starveling bough,
A fleecy thistle filched from by the wind,
A weed, Pan's trampling hoof would disallow?

Each, with a glory and a rapture twined
About it, joined the rush of air and light
And force: the world was of one joyous mind.

Say not the birds flew! they forebore their right —
Swam, revelling onward in the roll of things.
Say not the beasts' mirth bounded! that was flight —

How could the creatures leap, no lift of wings?
Such earth's community of purpose, such
The ease of earth's fulfilled imaginings, —

So did the near and far appear to touch
I' the moment's transport, — that an interchange
Of function, far with near, seemed scarce too much;

And had the rooted plant aspired to range
With the snake's license, while the insect yearned
To glow fixed as the flower, it were not strange —

No more than if the fluttery tree-top turned
To actual music, sang itself aloft;
Or if the wind, impassioned chantress, earned

The right to soar embodied in some soft
Fine form all fit for cloud-companionship,
And, blissful, once touch beauty chased so oft.

Thamuris, marching, let no fancy slip
Born of the fiery transport; lyre and song
Were his, to smite with hand and launch from lip —

Peerless recorded, since the list grew long
Of poets (saith Homeros) free to stand
Pedestalled mid the Muses' temple-throng,

A statued service, laurelled, lyre in hand,
(Ay, for we see them) — Thamuris of Thrace
Predominating foremost of the band.

Therefore the morn-ray that enriched his face,
If it gave lambent chill, took flame again
From flush of pride; he saw, he knew the place.

What wind arrived with all the rhythms from plain,
Hill, dale, and that rough wildwood interspersed?
Compounding these to one consummate strain,

It reached him, music; but his own outburst
Of victory concluded the account,
And that grew song which was mere music erst.

"Be my Parnassos, thou Pangaian mount!
And turn thee, river, nameless hitherto!
Famed shalt thou vie with famed Pieria's fount!

"Here I await the end of this ado:
Which wins — Earth's poet or the Heavenly
Muse." . . .

But song broke up in laughter. "Tell the rest
Who may! *I* have not spurned the common life,
Nor vaunted mine a lyre to match the Muse
Who sings for gods, not men! Accordingly,
I shall not decorate her vestibule —
Mute marble, blind the eyes and quenched the brain,
Loose in the hand a bright, a broken lyre!
— Not Thamuris but Aristophanes!

"There! I have sung content back to myself,
And started subject for a play beside.
My next performance shall content you both.
Did 'Prelude-Battle' maul 'best friend' too much?
Then 'Main-Fight' be my next song, fairness' self!
Its subject — Contest for the Tragic Crown.
Ay, you shall hear none else but Aischulos
Lay down the law of Tragedy, and prove
'Best friend' a stray-away, — no praise denied
His manifold deservings, never fear —
Nor word more of the old fun! Death defends.
Sound admonition has its due effect.
Oh, you have uttered weighty words, believe!
Such as shall bear abundant fruit, next year,
In judgment, regular, legitimate.
Let Bacchos' self preside in person! Ay —
For there 's a buzz about those 'Bacchanals'
Rumor attributes to your great and dead
For final effort: just the prodigy
Great dead men leave, to lay survivors low!
— Until we make acquaintance with our fate
And find, fate's worst done, we, the same, survive
Perchance to honor more the patron-god,
Fitlier inaugurate a festal year.
Now that the cloud has broken, sky laughs blue,
Earth blossoms youthfully. Athenai breathes.
After a twenty-six years' wintry blank
Struck from her life, — war-madness, one long swoon,
She wakes up: Arginousai bids good cheer.
We have disposed of Kallikratidas;
Once more will Spartê sue for terms, — who knows?
Cede Dekeleia, as the rumor runs:
Terms which Athenai, of right mind again,
Accepts — she can no other. Peace declared,
Have my long labors borne their fruit or no?

Grinned coarse buffoonery so oft in vain?
Enough — it simply saved you. Saved ones, praise
Theoria's beauty and Opora's breadth!
Nor, when Peace realizes promised bliss,
Forget the Bald Bard, Envy! but go burst
*As the cup goes round and the cates abound,*
*Collops of hare with roast spinks rare!*
Confess my pipings, dancings, posings served
A purpose: guttlings, guzzlings, had their use!
Say whether light Muse, Rosy-finger-tips,
Or 'best friend's' heavy-hand, Melpomenê,
Touched lyre to purpose, played Amphion's part,
And built Athenai to the skies once more!
Farewell, brave couple! Next year, welcome me!"

---

No doubt, in what he said that night, sincere!
One story he referred to, false or fact,
Was not without adaptability.
They do say — Lais the Corinthian once
Chancing to see Euripides (who paced
Composing in a garden, tablet-book
In left hand, with appended stulos prompt)
"Answer me," she began, "O Poet, — this!
What didst intend by writing in thy play
*Go hang, thou filthy doer?*" Struck on heap,
Euripides, at the audacious speech —
"Well now," quoth he, "thyself art just the one
I should imagine fit for deeds of filth!"
She laughingly retorted his own line
"What 's filth, — unless who does it, thinks it so?"

So might he doubtless think. "Farewell," said we.

And he was gone, lost in the morning-gray,
Rose-streaked and gold to eastward. Did we dream,

Could the poor twelve-hours hold this argument
We render durable from fugitive,
As duly at each sunset's droop of sail,
Delay of oar, submission to sea-might,
I still remember, you as duly dint
Remembrance, with the punctual rapid style,
Into — what calm cold page!

Thus soul escapes
From eloquence made captive: thus mere words
— Ah, would the lifeless body stay! But no:
Change upon change till, — who may recognize
What did soul service, in the dusty heap?
What energy of Aristophanes
Inflames the wreck Balaustion saves to show?
Ashes be evidence how fire — with smoke —
All night went lamping on! But morn must rise.
The poet — I shall say — burned up and, blank
Smouldered this ash, now white and cold enough.

Nay, Euthukles! for best, though mine it be,
Comes yet. Write on, write ever, wrong no word!

Add, first, — he gone, if jollity went too,
Some of the graver mood, which mixed and marred,
Departed likewise. Sight of narrow scope
Has this meek consolation: neither ills
We dread, nor joys we dare anticipate,
Perform to promise. Each soul sows a seed —
Euripides and Aristophanes;
Seed bears crop, scarce within our little lives;
But germinates, — perhaps enough to judge, —
Next year?

Whereas, next year brought harvest time!
For, next year came, and went not, but is now,

Still now, while you and I are bound for Rhodes
That's all but reached — and harvest has it brought,
Dire as the homicidal dragon-crop.
Sophokles had dismissal ere it dawned,
Happy as ever; though men mournfully
Plausive, — when only soul could triumph now,
And Iophon produced his father's play, —
Crowned the consummate song where Oidipous
Dared the descent mid earthquake-thundering,
And hardly Theseus' hands availed to guard
Eyes from the horror, as their grove disgorged
Its dread ones, while each daughter sank to ground.

Then Aristophanes, on heel of that,
Triumphant also, followed with his "Frogs:"
Produced at next Lenaia, — three months since, —
The promised Main-Fight, loyal, license-free!
As if the poet, primed with Thasian juice,
(Himself swore — wine that conquers every kind
For long abiding in the head) could fix
Thenceforward any object in its truth,
Through eyeballs bathed by mere Castalian dew,
Nor miss the borrowed medium, — vinous drop
That colors all to the right crimson pitch
When mirth grows mockery, censure takes the tinge
Of malice!

All was Aristophanes:
There blazed the glory, there shot black the shame.
Ay, Bacchos did stand forth, the Tragic God
In person! and when duly dragged through mire, —
Having lied, filched, played fool, proved coward, flung
The boys their dose of fit indecency,
And finally got trounced to heart's content,
At his own feast, in his own theatre

(— Oh never fear! 'T was consecrated sport,
Exact tradition, warranted no whit
Offensive to instructed taste, — indeed,
Essential to Athenai's liberty.
Could the poor stranger understand!) why, then —
He was pronounced the rarely-qualified
To rate the work, adjust the claims to worth,
Of Aischulos (of whom, in other mood,
This same appreciative poet pleased
To say "He 's all one stiff and gluey piece
Of back of swine's neck!") — and of Chatterbox
Who, "twisting words like wool," usurped his seat
In Plouton's realm: "the arch-rogue, liar, scamp
That lives by snatching-up of altar-orts,"
— Who failed to recognize Euripides?

Then came a contest for supremacy —
Crammed full of genius, wit and fun and freak.
No spice of undue spite to spoil the dish
Of all sorts, — for the Mystics matched the Frogs
In poetry, no Siren sang so sweet! —
Till, pressed into the service (how dispense
With Phaps-Elaphion and free foot-display?)
The Muse of dead Euripides danced frank,
Rattled her bits of tile, made all too plain
How baby-work like "Herakles" had birth!
Last, Bacchos, — candidly disclaiming brains
Able to follow finer argument, —
Confessed himself much moved by three main facts:
First, — if you stick a "Lost his flask of oil"
At pause of period, you perplex the sense —
Were it the Elegy for Marathon!
Next, if you weigh two verses, "car" — the word,
Will outweigh "club" — the word, in each packed
line!

And — last, worst fact of all! — in rivalry
The younger poet dared to improvise
Laudation less distinct of — Triphales?
(Nay, that served when ourself abused the youth!)
Pheidippides? (nor that 's appropriate now!)
Then, — Alkibiades, our city's hope,
Since times change and we Comics should change too!
These three main facts, well weighed, drew judgment down,
Conclusively assigned the wretch his fate —
"Fate due" admonished the sage Mystic choir,
"To sitting, prate-apace, with Sokrates,
Neglecting music and each tragic aid!"
— All wound-up by a wish "We soon may cease
From certain griefs, and warfare, worst of them!"
— Since, deaf to Comedy's persistent voice,
War still raged, still was like to rage. In vain
Had Spartê cried once more "But grant us Peace
We give you Dekeleia back!" Too shrewd
Was Kleophon to let escape, forsooth,
The enemy — at final gasp, besides!

So, Aristophanes obtained the prize,
And so Athenai felt she had a friend
Far better than her "best friend," lost last year;
And so, such fame had "Frogs" that, when came round
This present year, those Frogs croaked gay again
At the great Feast, Elaphebolion-month.
Only — there happened Aigispotamoi!

And, in the midst of the frog-merriment,
Plump o' the sudden, pounces stern King Stork
On the light-hearted people of the marsh!

Spartan Lusandros swooped precipitate,
Ended Athenai, rowed her sacred bay
With oars which brought a hundred triremes back
Captive!

And first word of the conqueror
Was "Down with those Long Walls, Peiraios' pride!
Destroy, yourselves, your bulwarks! Peace needs none!"
And "We obey" they shuddered in their dream.

But, at next quick imposure of decree —
"No longer democratic government!
Henceforth such oligarchy as ourselves
Please to appoint you!" — then the horror stung
Dreamers awake; they started up a-stare
At the half-helot captain and his crew
— Spartans, "men used to let their hair grow long,
To fast, be dirty, and just — Sokratize" —
Whose word was "Trample on Themistokles!"

So, as the way is with much misery,
The heads swam, hands refused their office, hearts
Sunk as they stood in stupor. "Wreck the Walls?
Ruin Peiraios? — with our Pallas armed
For interference? — Herakles apprised,
And Theseus hasting? Lay the Long Walls low?"

Three days they stood, stared, — stonier than their walls.

Whereupon, sleep who might, Lusandros woke:
Saw the prostration of his enemy,
Utter and absolute beyond belief,
Past hope of hatred even. I surmise

He also probably saw fade in fume
Certain fears, bred of Bakis-prophecy,
Nor apprehended any more that gods
And heroes, — fire, must glow forth, guard the ground
Where prone, by sober day-dawn, corpse-like lay
Powerless Athenai, late predominant
Lady of Hellas, — Sparté's slave-prize now!
Where should a menace lurk in those slack limbs?
What was to move his circumspection? Why
Demolish just Peiraios?

"Stay!" bade he:
"Already promise-breakers? True to type,
Athenians! past and present and to come —
The fickle and the false! No stone dislodged,
No implement applied, yet three days' grace
Expire! Forbearance is no longer-lived.
By breaking promise, terms of peace you break —
Too gently framed for falsehood, fickleness!
All must be reconsidered — yours the fault!"

Wherewith, he called a council of allies.
Pent-up resentment used its privilege, —
Outburst at ending: this the summed result.

"Because we would avenge no transient wrong
But an eternity of insolence,
Aggression, — folly, no disasters mend,
Pride, no reverses teach humility, —
Because too plainly were all punishment,
Such as comports with less obdurate crime,
Evadable by falsehood, fickleness —
Experience proves the true Athenian type, —
Therefore, 't is need we dig deep down into

The root of evil; lop nor bole nor branch.
Look up, look round and see, on every side,
What nurtured the rank tree to noisome fruit!
We who live hutted (so they laugh) not housed,
Build barns for temples, prize-mud-monuments,
Nor show the sneering stranger aught but — men, —
Spartans take insult of Athenians just
Because they boast Akropolis to mount,
And Propulaia to make entry by,
Through a mad maze of marble arrogance
Such as you see — such as let none see more!
Abolish the detested luxury!
Leave not one stone upon another, raze
Athenai to the rock! Let hill and plain
Become a waste, a grassy pasture-ground
Where sheep may wander, grazing goats depend
From shapeless crags once columns! so at last
Shall peace inhabit there, and peace enough."

Whereon, a shout approved "Such peace bestow!"

Then did a Man of Phokis rise — O heart!
Rise — when no bolt of Zeus disparted sky,
No omen-bird from Pallas scared the crew,
Rise — when mere human argument could stem
No foam-fringe of the passion surging fierce,
Baffle no wrath-wave that o'er barrier broke —
*Who* was the Man of Phokis rose and flung
A flower i' the way of that fierce foot's advance,
Which — stop for? — nay, had stamped down
sword's assault!
Could it be *He* stayed Sparté with the snatch
"Daughter of Agamemnon, late my liege,
Elektra, palaced once, a visitant
To thy poor rustic dwelling, now I come?"

Ay, facing fury of revenge, and lust
Of hate, and malice moaning to appease
Hunger on prey presumptuous, prostrate now —
Full in the hideous faces — last resource,
You flung that choric flower, my Euthukles!

And see, as through some pinhole, should the wind
Wedgingly pierce but once, in with a rush
Hurries the whole wild weather, rends to rags
The weak sail stretched against the outside storm —
So did the power of that triumphant play
Pour in, and oversweep the assembled foe!
Triumphant play, wherein our poet first
Dared bring the grandeur of the Tragic Two
Down to the level of our common life,
Close to the beating of our common heart.
Elektra? 'T was Athenai, Sparté's ice
Thawed to, while that sad portraiture appealed —
Agamemnonian lady, lost by fault
Of her own kindred, cast from house and home,
Despoiled of all the brave inheritance,
Dowered humbly as befits a herdsman's mate,
Partaker of his cottage, clothed in rags,
Patient performer of the poorest chares,
Yet mindful, all the while, of glory past
When she walked darling of Mukenai, dear
Beyond Orestes to the King of Men!

So, because Greeks are Greeks, though Sparté's brood,
And hearts are hearts, though in Lusandros' breast,
And poetry is power, and Euthukles
Had faith therein to, full-face, fling the same —
Sudden, the ice-thaw! The assembled foe,
Heaving and swaying with strange friendliness,

Cried "Reverence Elektra!" — cried "Abstain
Like that chaste Herdsman, nor dare violate
The sanctity of such reverse! Let stand
Athenai!"

Mindful of that story's close,
Perchance, and how, — when he, the Herdsman chaste,
Needs apprehend no break of tranquil sleep, —
All in due time, a stranger, dark, disguised,
Knocks at the door: with searching glance, notes keen,
Knows quick, through mean attire and disrespect,
The ravaged princess! Ay, right on, the clutch
Of guiding retribution has in charge
The author of the outrage! While one hand,
Elektra's, pulls the door behind, made fast
On fate, — the other strains, prepared to push
The victim-queen, should she make frightened pause
Before that serpentining blood which steals
Out of the darkness where, a pace beyond,
Above the slain Aigisthos, bides his blow
Dreadful Orestes!

Klutaimnestra, wise
This time, forbore; Elektra held her own;
Saved was Athenai through Euripides,
Through Euthukles, through — more than ever — me,
Balaustion, me, who, Wild-pomegranate-flower,
Felt my fruit triumph, and fade proudly so!

But next day, as ungracious minds are wont,
The Spartan, late surprised into a grace,
Grew sudden sober at the enormity,

And grudged, by daybreak, midnight's easy gift;
Splenetically must repay its cost
By due increase of rigor, doglike snatch
At aught still left dog to concede like man.
Rough sea, at flow of tide, may lip, perchance,
Smoothly the land-line reached as for repose —
Lie indolent in all unquestioned sway;
But ebbing, when needs must, all thwart and loth,
Sea claws at sand relinquished strugglingly.
So, harsh Lusandros — pinioned to inflict
The lesser penalty alone — spoke harsh,
As minded to embitter scathe by scorn.

"Athenai's self be saved then, thank the Lyre!
If Tragedy withdraws her presence — quick,
If Comedy replace her, — what more just?
Let Comedy do service, frisk away,
Dance off stage these indomitable stones,
Long Walls, Peiraian bulwarks! Hew and heave,
Pick at, pound into dust each dear defence!
Not to the Kommos — *elelelelеu*
With breast bethumped, as Tragic lyre prefers,
But Comedy shall sound the flute, and crow
At kordax-end — the hearty slapping-dance!
Collect those flute-girls — trash who flattered ear
With whistlings and fed eye with caper-cuts
While we Lakonians supped black broth or crunched
Sea-urchin, conchs and all, unpricked — coarse brutes!
Command they lead off step, time steady stroke
To spade and pickaxe, till demolished lie
Athenai's pride in powder!"

Done that day —
That sixteenth famed day of Munuchion-month!

The day when Hellas fought at Salamis,
The very day Euripides was born,
Those flute-girls — Phaps-Elaphion at their head —
Did blow their best, did dance their worst, the while
Spartê pulled down the walls, wrecked wide the works,
Laid low each merest molehill of defence,
And so the Power, Athenai, passed away!

We would not see its passing. Ere I knew
The issue of their counsels, — crouching low
And shrouded by my peplos, — I conceived,
Despite the shut eyes, the stopped ears, — by count
Only of heart-beats, telling the slow time, —
Athenai's doom was signed and signified
In that assembly, — ay, but knew there watched
One who would dare and do, nor bate at all
The stranger's licensed duty, — speak the word
Allowed the Man from Phokis! Naught remained
But urge departure, flee the sights and sounds,
Hideous exultings, wailings worth contempt,
And press to other earth, new heaven, by sea
That somehow ever prompts to 'scape despair.

Help rose to heart's wish; at the harbor-side,
The old gray mariner did reverence
To who had saved his ship, still weather-tight
As when with prow gay-garlanded she praised
The hospitable port and pushed to sea.
"Convoy Balaustion back to Rhodes, for sake
Of her and her Euripides!" laughed he.

Rhodes, — shall it not be there, my Euthukles,
Till this brief trouble of a life-time end,
That solitude — two make so populous! —

For food finds memories of the past suffice,
May be, anticipations, — hope so swells, —
Of some great future we, familiar once
With who so taught, should hail and entertain?
He lies now in the little valley, laughed
And moaned about by those mysterious streams,
Boiling and freezing, like the love and hate
Which helped or harmed him through his earthly course.
They mix in Arethousa by his grave.
The warm spring, traveller, dip thine arms into,
Brighten thy brow with! Life detests black cold.

I sent the tablets, the psalterion, so
Rewarded Sicily; the tyrant there
Bestowed them worthily in Phoibos' shrine.
A gold-graved writing tells — "I also loved
The poet, Frce Athenai cheaply prized —
King Dionusios, — Archelaos-like!"

And see if young Philemon, — sure one day
To do good service and be loved himself, —
If he too have not made a votive verse!
"Grant, in good sooth, our great dead, all the same,
Retain their sense, as certain wise men say,
I'd hang myself — to see Euripides!"
Hands off, Philemon! nowise hang thyself,
But pen the prime plays, labor the right life,
And die at good old age as grand men use, —
Keeping thee, with that great thought, warm the while, —
That he does live, Philemon! Ay, most sure!
"He lives!" hark, — waves say, winds sing out the same,
And yonder dares the citied ridge of Rhodes

Its headlong plunge from sky to sea, disparts
North bay from south, — each guarded calm, that guest
May enter gladly, blow what wind there will, —
Boiled round with breakers, to no other cry!
All in one choros, — what the master-word
They take up? — hark! "There are no gods, no gods!
Glory to God — who saves Euripides!"

# NOTES

## Balaustion's Adventure

**Balaustion's Adventure.** Balaustion, a young girl from Rhodes, tells her four friends of an adventure she had a short time before, when, owing to the defeat of the Athenian arms at Syracuse, the people of Rhodes threw off their allegiance to Athens and prepared to join the Spartan league. She, however, though but a girl, gathered her friends about her, exhorting them not to throw off Athens for Sparta's sake, but fly with her to Athens. Having procured a ship, she and her friends fled toward Athens; but an adverse wind blew them out of their course, and as they were nearing land which the captain thought to be Crete, they suddenly found themselves chased by a pirate-vessel. They rowed with all their might toward the land, which unluckily turned out to be unfriendly Sicily and Syracuse, not Crete. When a galley came out to challenge them, the captain tried the policy of a non-committal answer to the questions of the crew; but they had heard Balaustion singing the famous Athens song, "O Sons of Greeks," etc., so suspected them to be Athenian sympathizers and refused them a harbor. The prayers of their captain were in vain, and they were about to turn and fall into the hands of the pirate when, after some consultation, the crew of the galley called to them to wait. They had heard the song of Aischulos, and wished to learn if the strangers knew anything of Euripides, the newer poet. Balaustion relates how they remembered that the year before, any Athenian captured in war who could teach the Syracusans some of Euripides had been treated with the greatest kindness. Therefore the captain delightedly

presents to them Balaustion, the lyric girl, and tells how all through the voyage she had recited bits of Euripides to suit every occasion, so that they had called her wild pomegranate flower (Balaustion), because wherever it blows you will find food, drink, odor, everything to give joy and comfort, as she gave joy and comfort with her Euripides. He bids her sing them a strophe; but she declares she will do better than that, and recite the whole play of "Alkestis," if the Syracusans will save them. She had recently seen it acted in her own city, and besides being very beautiful it did especial honor to their God Herakles, to whom she comes, she declares, as a suppliant. So with great joy, all the city joining in the procession, they bore her to the temple of Herakles, where she told the play as she had seen it, three days running, after which they were sent on their way rejoicing. One man brought her a whole talent for herself, which she left on the tripod in the fane; a band of captives sent her a crown of wild pomegranates; but one young man sat at the foot of the temple each day, was also on the ship, and was beside her when she landed; and the result is they are soon to marry.

Upon her arrival at Athens, her first desire is to find and thank Euripides, much to the wonder of many, who smiled that he should save them, not Aischulos or Sophokles, or even some other of the younger bards, instead of this unsociable poet who never kept good company and was all bearded and freckled. She tells how she found him, and remarks upon the fact that men do not love either him or his friend Sokrates, — for how should they with their brains dry to the marrow? She herself had been criticised for describing the expression of the actors' faces, for how could she see these things under the mask? The explanation is not difficult, she thinks, — for poetry, being a power that makes, when it speaks to one sense, rouses the rest through the sympathetic imagination; so when she hears the actors speak, she imagines the expression of the faces.

Now she will tell her friends the play as she told it to the Syracusans, and they must bear with her if she adds her own comments sometimes, as the ivy twines about the columns of the temple opposite.

The story upon which the play is founded is, in brief, as follows: —

Apollo was banished to earth by Zeus, and served Admetos as a shepherd in punishment for having directed his arrows against the Cyclops. This, Apollo did to avenge the death of his son Æsculapius, whom Zeus had slain with thunderbolts forged by the Cyclops because he had brought some one to life with his skill. While serving Admetos, Apollo grew very fond of him, and when Admetos was at the point of death, asked the Fates that he might be allowed to live out a term equal to his former life. The Fates had agreed on condition that another life should be substituted for his. Alkestis, his wife, was the only one found willing to make the sacrifice, his father and mother both having refused. (See "Apollo and the Fates," prologue to the "Parleyings.") Not long after this Herakles arrives at the house of Admetos, and, in spite of the sorrow there, is welcomed and honored with lavish hospitality; but he learns from a servant what had befallen Alkestis, so he goes to her tomb and wrestles with Death, whom he conquers, and takes Alkestis, disguised in a cloak, to Admetos, and requests him to receive and keep her, saying she was a prize he had borne off in wrestling. Admetos, however, refuses. Then Herakles unveils the lady and restores her to her grief-stricken husband.

In describing the play, Balaustion gives a vivid picture of the scenes and stage business. She quotes most of it directly, though sometimes telling about it indirectly, and from time to time adds her own comments and criticisms. The most important of these are as follows: —

**Lines 670-716.** Balaustion declares she understands what Death meant when he called Alkestis consecrate to

Hades. She believes the office of Death's sword was to cut the soul off from life, so that Alkestis now saw everything in its right relation, and was no longer deceived as to the true nature of Admetos, although he wept plenteously, etc., for she addresses no more words of love to her husband. The rest was for herself and her children.

**879-909.** She notes that Admetos stood sobbing like an irresponsible child, as if he had not known for a long time what the pact was. Now the event was here, he made a great fuss over his sorrow, but never thought of declaring that it was beyond his power to keep the pact, and beseeching the Fates to save his wife's life and take his. Nor did Alkestis deceive herself with the idea that any such thought had come into his mind; so all she noticed in his speech was that which referred to his children.

**1031-1084.** Here Balaustion describes Herakles, hopeful and joyous in his strength, who labored all his life for man's sake, who could bravely meet sorrow, remembering that there were other sorrows in the world waiting to be met; and she is not surprised that they could not tell such a one, who held his life out on his hand, of the selfishness of every one there, all of whom from Admetos down were afraid to die.

**1242-1257.** Balaustion observes that the conscience of Admetos is being aroused through his seeing the magnanimity of Herakles, and that while under his large influence the people about the palace begin to feel that the cloud of grief may some day drift away.

**1364-1377.** She observes that Admetos's irritation at his father is so great because he recognizes in him his own selfish nature.

**1431-1444.** She further observes that in the talk between Admetos and Pheres weakness strove to hide itself in bluster against weakness; but Pheres proves himself to be the stouter stuff, the flintiest of heart, for he came with pacific intentions, desiring that by-

gones should be bygones; but Admetos is sensitive about what has happened, and breaks out venomously against his father.

**1511-1523.** She draws another comparison between the too. Pheres glories the more he exposes his son's weakness, while Admetos grows more and more to hate the weakness in his father which he recognizes equally in himself. She wishes the friends might have been brave enough to show them up to themselves, instead of simply trying to stop their talk.

**1590-1594.** She perceives that Admetos is only half selfish now, after his talk with his father, since he has grown sensitive.

**1679-1778.** Charopé (as it turns out afterwards) ventures to consider the old servant justified for hating Herakles, when Balaustion rushes valiantly to the defence of Herakles. Had this old servant, who knew everything from the first, ever ventured to suggest that Admetos should die himself rather than accept the sacrifice of his wife, or pointed out to him that life would not be worth living without the beloved one? Instead of that, he chimed in with the pother about Alkestis being the best, best, best one. Could he find no one to hate, from Admetos and Pheres down to his own heroic self, but Herakles, who being weary had simply allowed himself rest and relaxation after his labors? His only excuse for hating him must be that he did not know the guest was Herakles, or else he considered that lightness must needs indicate badness, — that is, he was not able to base his judgments upon anything but mere externals; only so, could he be justified for his hate.

**1999-2009.** She observes that Admetos is beginning to be like his wife, and realize the real truth of the situation; his tears have ceased to flow, and he perceives her to be happier in making the sacrifice than he in accepting it.

**2435-2660.** Balaustion proposes a version of her own of the Alkestis myth, according to which the character

of Admetos should have been so graciously moulded by Apollo during the God's sojourn as shepherd that he had vowed to rule in Pherai solely for his people's sake. And when he heard he must die he calmly prepared for death, yet mourned that he was not to be permitted to live his life out, that he might finish his work. His ancestors who had lived simply for their own ends lingered to old age; why must he die? Then Alkestis tells him that when Apollo was with them, he prophesied the coming fate, whereat she pleaded with him that he would permit Admetos to live and carry out his heart's wish at whatever price. Apollo commended her for her recognition of how much could be done in time, and for her apprehension that should Admetos die, the Gods' purpose in his life would be frustrated, yet, he added, a mortal might penetrate farther, and see that no fruit of man's life will fade; that his death through inspiring pity and terror at earthly chance and change might awake seeds of good asleep. Nevertheless he granted the request upon condition that she would die for her husband. So was the pact concluded, and now she asks Admetos to embrace her and bid her hail, for she is supremely happy. Admetos refuses this with a passionate cry. Let Zeus fulfil his purposes through some other man if not through him. In himself he had the special purpose that his earthly life should be bound up with that of Alkestis, the two proving one force. Since death divides them, it is better for Admetos to go, for Alkestis was as spirit to his flesh, so let the flesh perish and the spirit live on. But she asks him, would he, for any joy to be enjoyed, any sorrow to be escaped, unwill his will to reign a righteous king? If there were a choice between life in which good resolve should go to air and death whereby finest fancy might grow plain fact, death would be the choice. Could he have loved her if she had been less able to weigh both life and death than he? Shall they both see good alike, choose good for each, and yet at the end choose evil for each other? That is, she

looks upon them so entirely as one being, that the choice is to be made regardless of each as individuals and in such a manner as will best carry out their combined ideal, which is, according to Alkestis, through his living and ruling. Then they looked at each other, and the soul of Alkestis entered his. She died, and her soul travelled to the Queen of Hades and demanded to become a ghost, whereat the queen laughed and sent her back to earth, for Death mocked her since the life left behind was formidably doubled. And so, before the embrace relaxed, Alkestis was alive again, and the two lived out their lives happily and well together, though there was no record that they had brought about a golden age. Balaustion finishes by telling of a poet who appreciated Euripides, though he took only the second prize, and of a painter who made a beautiful picture of Alkestis. The poet is Mrs. Browning, the painter Sir Frederick Leighton, — anachronisms more daring than any Shakespeare ever ventured upon.

The story of Balaustion's adventure is founded upon a passage in Plutarch's "Lives," in the biography of Nikias, who was the leader of the Athenian expedition against Syracuse in the year 413 B. C. This was during the second period of the Peloponnesian war, when the great struggle between Athens and Sparta for the leadership of Greece was in progress. Many of the Athenians were taken prisoners and treated with great cruelty, but, according to Plutarch, "several were saved for the sake of Euripides, whose poetry, it appears, was in request among the Sicilians more than among any of the settlers out of Greece. And when any travellers arrived that could tell them some passage, or give them any specimen of his verses, they were delighted to be able to communicate them to one another. Many of the captives who got safe back to Athens are said, after they reached home, to have gone and made their acknowledgments to Euripides, relating how that some of them had been released from their slavery by teaching what they could

remember of his poems, and others, when straggling after the fight, had been relieved with meat and drink, for repeating some of his lyrics. Nor need this be any wonder, for it is told that a ship of Kaunos fleeing into one of their harbors for protection, pursued by pirates, was not received, but forced back, till one asked if they knew any of Euripides' verses, and on their saying they did, they were admitted, and their ship brought into harbor."

The verse at the beginning of the poem is from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "Wine of Cyprus."

**2.** *Kameiros:* a Dorian town on the west coast of the Island of Rhodes, the principal town until the town of Rhodes was founded.

**7.** *Nikias:* the commander with two other generals, Eurymedon and Demosthenes, against Sicily in the Peloponnesian war. They laid siege to Syracuse for two years, but they found it impregnable and were about to retire, when they were attacked by the Syracusans. Nicias and Demosthenes, with a great part of the troops, were made prisoners. Nicias was put to death by them in 413 B. C.

**8.** *Syracuse:* capital of the Island of Sicily, which lies to the south of Italy.

**9.** *Athens:* the most famous city of Greece for culture, and capital of Attica.

**11.** *Rhodes:* a celebrated island in the Carpathian Sea south of Caria.

**14.** *The League:* Spartan League against the domination of Athens.

**15.** *Sparta:* the city of Greece most celebrated for its warlike qualities, capital of Laconia in the Peloponnesus, the peninsula forming the southern part of Greece.

**17.** *Knidos:* a town of Doris in Caria, on the Triopian promontory.

**21.** *Ilissian:* Trojan.

**29.** *Gate of Diomedes:* this gate led to a grove and

gymnasium. — *Hippadai:* gate which led to the suburb of Cerameicus.

**32.** *Lakonia:* the province of which Sparta was the capital.

**33.** *Choës:* pitchers, a festival of Bacchus or Dionysus held at Athens. — *Chutroi:* pots, also a feast of Bacchus.

**34.** *Agora:* the market-place at Athens. — *Dikasteria:* tribunals. — *Poikilé:* same as Poecile, the great hall at Athens adorned with fresco paintings of the Battle of Marathon by Polygnotus and other pictures.

**35.** *Pnux:* a place at Athens which was set aside by Solon for holding assemblies. — *Keramikos:* two suburbs of Athens had this name. — *Salamis:* the island on the west coast of Attica where the celebrated battle was fought in which the Greeks gained the victory over Xerxes, 480 B. C.

**36.** *Psuttalia:* a small island not far from Salamis. — *Marathon:* a plain twenty-two miles from Athens, where the famous battle against the Persians was fought in 490 B. C.

**37.** *Dionusiac theatre:* this great theatre was on the Acropolis at Athens.

**39.** *Aischulos:* the father of Greek tragic drama. He composed seventy plays, and gained the prize for dramatic excellence thirteen times. Of these plays only seven remain. He has been described as dwelling "habitually in the loftiest region of the stern old religious mythology of primæval Greece, his moral tone is pure, his character earnest and manly, and his strictly dramatic power (notwithstanding the very imperfect form of the drama in that day), as exhibited more especially in the 'Agamemnon,' the 'Eumenides,' and in some parts of the 'Prometheus,' is such as none of his famous successors, least of all Euripides, could surpass" (525–456). — *Sophokles:* shares with Æschylus the honor of being the greatest of Greek tragic poets. Ancient critics admired him for his mingled felicity and boldness and his subtle delineation of human nature

and feeling. They noted that the balanced proportions and fine articulation of his work are such that in a single half-line or phrase he often conveys the impression of an entire character. He wrote something over a hundred dramas, all but seven of which have perished, while none of his minor poems have been preserved (495–406 B. C.). — *Euripides:* called the founder of the Modern Romantic Drama. He broke away from the traditions followed by Æschylus and Sophocles, and presented the themes of Mythology in a more human guise; the passions and sorrow of every-day life were portrayed with greater vividness and directness. The "Alkestis" was brought out in the spring of 438 B. C. at the Dionysiac theatre, and may be said to mark the very beginning of the transition from the purely Hellenic drama to the Romantic. He wrote seventy-five plays, a large proportion of which are lost (480–406 B. C.).

**43.** *Kaunos:* one of the principal cities of Caria in Asia Minor and founded by the Cretans.

**50.** *Point Malea:* a promontory of the Peloponnesus.

**54.** *Cos:* one of the islands of the cluster called the Sporades, off the coast of Asia Minor. — *Crete:* an island of the Mediterranean south of the Ægean Sea.

**63.** *Lokrian:* there were three tribes of people known under this name. This probably refers to the Locri Ozolæ, who occupied a narrow tract of country situated on the northern shore of the Corinthian Gulf, who were described as a wild uncivilized race, addicted from the earliest times to theft and rapine. — *Thessaly:* one of the northern provinces of Greece.

**87.** *Ortugia:* an island close to Syracuse and really part of the city.

**107.** *Daily pint of corn:* according to Thucydides, "They were tormented with hunger and thirst; for during eight months they gave each of them daily only a cotyle (about half a pint) of water and two of corn."

**130.** *That song was veritable Aischulos:* the song Balaustion sang.

**135.** *Salpinx:* a trumpet.

**140.** *Gulippos:* a Lacedæmonian (equivalent to Spartan), who was sent to assist Syracuse against the Athenians. He gained a celebrated victory over Nicias and Demosthenes, the Athenian generals, and obliged them to surrender.

**145.** *"Region of the Steed":* meaning Greece, because horses were supposed by the Greeks to have originated in their land.

**159.** *With who cried "Decadence":* Euripides was criticised at the time for not having conformed to the same standards of dramatic composition as the older poets, Sophocles and Æschylus.

**161.** *God Bacchos:* the son of Zeus and Semele, and god of the vine and the fluid forces of nature.

**167.** *Rhesis:* a saying, or passage, from an author, especially a speech in a play. — *Monostich:* a single verse.

**183.** *Euoi:* Bacchanalian exclamation.

**184.** *Oöp:* exclamation of surprise.

**187.** *Babai:* exclamation of surprise.

**210.** *Rosy Isle:* Rhodes is said to have been named from roses, rodon.

**215.** *Verse that ends all, proverb-like:* many of the plays of Euripides end with this idea expressed in slightly different ways: "Many are the shapes of things the deities direct, and many things the Gods perform contrary to our expectations. And those things which we looked for are not accomplished; but the God hath brought to pass things not looked for. Such hath been the event of this affair."

**222.** *Glaukinos:* Archon in Athens, 438 B. C. The theatre was under the control of the Chief Archon.

**225.** *Lenean feast:* held in honor of Bacchus, in the month Lenaion (latter part of January and first of February) when contests in comedy were held.

**271.** *Peiraieus:* the port of Athens, about five miles from the city.

**272.** *Anthesterion-month:* February–March.

**284.** *Agathon:* a tragic poet of Athens, and a friend of Euripides and Plato. — *Iophon:* a son of Sophocles, a tragic poet not especially distinguished.

**285.** *Kephisophon:* another of the younger poets of Athens, a friend of Euripides.

**293.** *Sokrates:* the celebrated philosopher of Athens, who taught in the groves of Academus and in the Lyceum on the banks of the Ilissus. Though he had many disciples, he also had enemies, because of the independence of his teaching. He was accused finally of corrupting the Athenian youth, of introducing innovations in religion, and of ridiculing the gods, and condemned to die by poison. His teachings have come to us through Xenophon and Plato (468–399 B. C.).

**310.** *Mask of the actor move:* in Greece the actors always wore masks.

**338.** *Baccheion:* the Dionysiac temple.

**374.** *Phoibos:* the bright or pure; a name for Apollo, the god of the sun, and later of the arts. — *Asklepios:* same as Æsculapius, son of Apollo, and god of medicine.

**383.** *Moirai:* the Fates, who rule over human life — Clotho, who spins the thread of life; Lachesis, who determines the length of the thread, and Atropos, who cuts it off.

**438.** *Pelias' daughter:* Alcestis was the daughter of Pelias, son of Poseidon and of Tyro.

**476.** *Eurustheus:* King of Mycenæ, who imposed upon Heracles his twelve labors as expiation for the murder of his children during a fit of insanity sent upon him by Juno.

**516.** *Paian:* a name given to Apollo because of his power to heal, derived from the Homeric physician of the gods, Paian or Pæan. A hymn of thanksgiving addressed to Apollo was called a Pæan.

**539.** *Lukia:* same as Lycia, a country of Asia Minor. — *Ammon's seat:* there was a temple to Jupiter Ammon in the Lybian Oasis, in Egypt.

685. *Pharos:* a veil.

728. *Iolkos:* a town of Thessaly.

733. *Charon:* the boatman on the river Styx, over which all souls had to pass to Hades. The ferry was paid by an obolus placed in the mouth of the corpse.

865. *Orpheus:* son of Apollo and the muse Calliope, the most famous of musicians. Not only mortals, but wild beasts and trees and rocks, were sensible to his charm. He went to Hades to seek his wife, Eurydice, who had been bitten by a serpent, charmed every one in Hades with his music, and was permitted to carry his wife back on condition that he should not turn round to look at her till they reached the upper air. They had almost completed their journey back to the light when a sudden impulse made Orpheus turn, and he lost her.

866. *Koré:* a name of Proserpine, the Queen of Hades.

868. *Plouton's dog:* the three-headed dog Cerberus, which guarded the gates of Hades.

996. *Acherontian lake:* one of the rivers of Hades was called Acheron, the river of Woe.

1000. *Seven-stringed mountain-shell:* an early form of Greek lyre had seven strings with a tortoise shell for a sounding-board.

1003. *Karneian month:* August–September, when the festival to Apollo Karneias, the protector of flocks, was celebrated.

1010. *Kokutos' stream:* a river of the under world.

1041. *Lustral bath:* purifying bath.

1047. *Herakles:* son of Zeus and Alcmene. Juno being hostile to him, was the cause of his having to suffer many ills and undergo many labors. His bravery and success in all these undertakings earned for him the distinction of being the strongest of the demigods, as well as of being considered the unselfish helper of humanity.

1089. *Tirunthian:* same as Tirynthian, from the town Tirynthus, in Argolis, of which Eurystheus was king.

1093. *Thrakian Diomedes:* one of the labors of Heracles was to destroy this King of Thrace, who fed his horses upon human flesh.

1097. *Bistones:* Thracians.

1115. *Ares:* the god of war; his favorite abode was Thrace. — *Targe:* a shield.

1122. *Lukaon:* a mythical King of Arcadia.

1123. *Kuknos:* some as Cycnus, a son of Mars and Pelopea, whom Heracles slew.

1143. *Sprung from Perseus too:* Alcmene was a granddaughter of Perseus.

1261. *The lyric Puthian:* Puthian, same as Pythian, a name given to Apollo, derived from the python which he slew. Apollo, being also the god of the arts, was worshipped by musical contentions in his honor at Delphi; hence he was called the lyric Pythian. He was himself master of the lyre which Hermes gave him.

1268. *Othrus' dell:* in Thessaly, in the mountains of Othrys, where the Centaurs lived.

1277. *Boibian lake:* near Mount Ossa, in Thessaly.

1281. *Molossoi:* a people of Epirus, the province next to Thessaly, to the north of Greece.

1282. *Aigaian:* same as Ægean Sea. — *Pelion:* a mountain of Thessaly.

1468. *Ludian:* same as Lydian, from Lydia, a province of Asia Minor.

1469. *Phrugian:* same as Phrygian, from Phrygia, a province of Asia Minor.

1597. *Hermes:* son of Zeus and Maia, god of the wind, and conductor of the souls of the dead to Hades. — *Hades:* a name for Pluto, the god of the under world, as well as a name for the under world itself.

1601. *Bride of Hades:* Proserpine.

1697. *Turannos:* tyrannus, tyrant.

1717. *Ai, ai, pheu, pheu, e, papai:* woe, alas, alas, O strange!

1801. *Kupris:* same as Cyprus, a name for Venus.

1858. *Larissa:* a town in Thessaly.

**1883.** *Elektruon:* same as Electryon. — *Tiruns:* same as Tiryns, from the town Tirynthus, in Argolis.

**2064.** *Thrakian tablets*, etc.: the name of Orpheus is associated with Thrace, and the Orphic literature contained treatises on medicine written on tablets; hence Thracian tablets.

**2066.** *Asklepiadai:* sons of Æsculapius, or physicians.

**2076.** *Chaluboi:* a people of Asia Minor.

**2195.** *Pheraioi:* natives of Pheræ.

**2377.** *Sthenelos:* son of Perseus and Andromeda, father of Eurystheus.

**2430.** *Mainad:* a priestess of Bacchus.

**2489.** *As some long last moan of a minor*, etc.: a minor chord written in its first inversion, that is, with the third in the base, can suddenly be changed to a major chord by chromatically raising the third.

**2522.** *Olumpian:* same as Olympian, from Mount Olympus.

**2600.** *A car, submissive brutes of blood were yoked to:* Pelias promised his daughter to him who should woo her in a chariot drawn by lions and boars. Admetus accomplished this with the aid of Apollo.

**2625.** *Straying among the flowers in Sicily:* Proserpine's daughter was gathering flowers in the fields of Enna one day when Pluto carried her away into the infernal regions, and she became his bride.

**2668.** *I know the poetess*, etc.: Mrs. Browning in her "Wine of Cyprus."

**2672.** *A great Kaunian painter:* there was a painter named Protogenes, a native of the Carian city of Kaunia, who flourished 332–300 B. C. His countrymen were ignorant of his genius until the painter Apelles came to Rhodes and offered to buy all his pictures. The picture described as by him is, however, one by the great English painter, Sir Frederick Leighton, reproduced as the frontispiece of this volume.

## Aristophanes' Apology

**Aristophanes' Apology.** Balaustion, with her husband, Euthukles, is on board a boat bound for her island home, Rhodes, after the fall of Athens. She sorrows especially over the hideous manner of its fall, describing in a fine passage the sort of end to Athens she could more easily have borne, since she would have herself shared in it; yet Athens undisgraced lives in hers and her husband's hearts. Why, after all, should they despair, since above all the wickedness and folly of the world the soul may be transported by wind and cloud? Surely, she thinks, there is a realm where truth and beauty are ensphered above falsehood and ugliness, and where Euripides will be seen clearer than any mortal sense ever perceived him. Now; as she looks upon the event more calmly, she perceives there is justice in the doom of Athens. Her pride and boasting and oppression were pitted against Sparta's, and she fell, revealing the rottenness into which she had sunk — the sole class that remained true to its functions being the dancing-girls.

But she will make the glories of Athens — its art and poetry — live again in her heart. Inspired by Pheidias (the sculptor), she will build a spirit-place, peopled with the great ones of Athens; but lest they should need the spur of evil, such as they have had through the meaner souls that maligned them in life, she would have evil still to spur them on, but related in due degree to their godship, — a Momus against a Zeus. Or if Euripides should sigh, with one of his characters in the Heraclidæ, Makaria, that it would be better to have nothing after death than contention, she will agree, though she believes there can be no progress without contention.

She suggests to Euthukles, who is silent while she awakens these painful memories, that perhaps it is better to drag them out to the light than let them gnaw

in silence, pretending they are forgotten. Fully recognized and dwelt upon, they will be more likely to die. What if they take a middle course, and turn this event into a tragic theme? However, since Phrunichos had offended by dramatizing a too recent event (and making all the audience weep), in consequence of which he had been fined, perhaps it would be better for them to rehearse a prologue at least a year away in a second adventure she had had. The mention of this causes her to muse a little over the scene when she told her four friends about her first adventure, and how Euripides had brought out his "Andromedé," and was next month to bring out "Kresphontes," and in that month she was to marry Euthukles.

Now, if next year enslaved Athens should present a trilogy of Euripides, he will not be there to teach the chorus, and they will be exiles from dead Athens. After all, the best of Athens still lives for them in the cloud and new-born star. So they will speak to infinite intelligence, and turn their voyage into a glorious day of sunset closes, and will make live again a certain evening when they became acquainted with an apparitional visitor, whom she describes as an admixture of brilliancy and badness (Aristophanes).

It was the night a year ago that Euthukles had come in and told her that their beloved Euripides was dead, and to her questioning eyes had replied that he had died triumphant still. He worked as he willed, and had never lacked during his life appreciation from those competent to judge his work. He had not attempted to be a poet and a public man at the same time, though the multitude girded at him for neglecting civic duties, and voted for Sophokles because he at least tried the experiment of commanding a squadron. Instead, he ran to the turn of life's race, wrote his hundred plays, and then, like the racer rounding the race-course, left Athens, where he was jeered at for his secluded habits, and began in his old age an active life with Archelaos

of Makedonia, whose counsellor he became, and while there wrote also several more plays. Thus his poet friend, Agathon, had written.

The news had greatly stirred up Athens, silenced all the ordinary floating gossip, caused the crowd to lose interest even in Aristophanes' last success (in which Euripides was satirized). To the insulting questions of the crowd as to Euripides, Euthukles replies with calm statements of facts about him, but grows warm at the insinuations attributed to Sophokles by "Comic Platon," and retorts that it was he who had maligned Euripides in "The Festivals" (a play), while he reminds the others that they had just been enjoying another fling at Euripides in the play which he (Euthukles) had spit on the year before. He advises them to give up judging poetry and price cuttlefish, etc., for he will have none of their foul dreams.

Balaustion cannot express any opinion on this particular play, because after having seen the "Lusistraté" of Aristophanes, she had never seen another, having then been entirely disgusted with his methods of preserving the ancient "freedom" in Comedy, which consisted in Virtue telling Vice its faults. Aristophanes, having constituted himself sole judge as to what was vice and what virtue (thus he could expose as vicious any man whose opinions differed from his own as in the case of Euripides), showed up vice by presenting it in all its coarseness, and making fun of it to the hilarious amusement of the audience. In this last play he had even thrown off his pretensions to any underlying good purpose, and come out honestly as glorying in "muck" for its own sake, the author's undisguised soul being "secreted to a play," that is, separated from himself and let go into this play, which shows him as he really is. But now that Euripides is dead, wrong seems no longer to touch him; even the people seem to feel something of this sort, for, as Euthukles explains, the whole town now wants to pay tribute to him in a statue and

so on. But Balaustion would choose a more fitting way of honoring her poet. Let Euthukles and herself sing to the poet's spirit the play he had given Balaustion, "Herakles." She is prologizing over the events of Herakle's life preparatory to reading the play, when suddenly Aristophanes demands entrance. He is accompanied by his actors and chorus, flushed with the day's triumph and intoxicated by the subsequent feast, and also by a rabble of dancing-girls and flute-boys, — "All for the Patriot Cause," etc., Balaustion sarcastically remarks.

Balaustion describes the appearance of Aristophanes as possessing power and strength in spite of the fact that he was drunk, for which she half excuses him on the ground that sensuality was become a religious rite. She is impressed with the fact that he had a mind able, whenever he chose, to master his lower instincts; even now they had been wreathing about him, but he had conquered and stood before her free. Aristophanes addresses Balaustion in a graceful speech as the friend of Euripides, calls her Victory's self, tries to think of her name, and so on, then asks for his musical instrument, evidently with the idea of addressing an ode to her; but Balaustion's effect upon the rabble has been to abash them so that most of them have slunk into the background or else dispersed. Seeing this, the mood of Aristophanes becomes one of defiance on his own part toward Balaustion; he dismisses his followers, declaring that, left alone, he can protect himself against her.

When the company takes him at his word, he complains that the Archon (a ruler of the city) is constantly wanting to curtail the expenses of the theatre for the benefit of the war, though if they will but leave him his actors, he will continue to triumph, even if to suit squeamish manners he can no longer use his vulgar methods of pleasing the crowd. As he enumerates some of these methods, Balaustion turns toward him,

and he exclaims, "True, I am drunk;" but that is the proper inspiration for Comedy, otherwise he would have been a tragic poet, like Phrunichos or Choirilos, and Aisculus would not have beaten him in tragedy (goat-song). Only by drinking did Kratinos take the prize away from him with his Comedy, which Aristophanes promised him should not happen again. So on this triumph-night he is drunk, the Archon having entertained them bountifully at supper. With a changed look Aristophanes tells how, in the midst of their revelry, something extraordinary had happened. He observes that Balaustion notices the change in him, and tells her that he now stands undisguised before her, and begs her to speak boldly to him.

She does speak boldly, and welcomes him for the best aspects of his nature and genius, — a kindly humor that castigates his kind without vindictiveness; satire that truly aims to purify the world from evil; wit that discovers and exposes the faults of knaves, fools and cowards, but leaves the good undesecrated; a patriotism that might save Athens would she trust to it. The light in him she hails, even though it has been and will again be lost in a darkness which never should have been his. She illustrates with a pertinent myth, comparing him with a fish-like god whose tail and fins are hidden; to the godlike part in him she does reverence. But there followed a frisk of fin! Aristophanes, instead of responding to the greeting in a proper spirit, has been impressed by Balaustion's manner, and asks if he (Euripides) taught her Tragedy, launching forth about how he had always thought women ought to act, and how he would execute such a reform if he had two lives. The difficulty would be to break down prejudice and ignorance three generations thick. The father of Comedy, Susarion, battered out his comedies with a stone, the next generation used a club. All he can do is to stud the club which the later writer of Comedy used.

Balaustion breaks in here, and asks him if he has

planed and studded the club by exchanging fighting for persuasion, by convicting ignorance and folly with wisdom and knowledge, instead of pitting against ignorance and folly fresh ignorance and folly; was it a conviction of the worth of such a method which was the strange thing that happened to him at the feast?

Aristophanes explains how it is impossible for him to make such a change in his dramatic methods as she and Euthukles want. His function is not to renew art. The strength to do this belongs to those who shut themselves up in a closet, away from sympathetic cheer and friendly faces, or better, in a cave, with man dwindled into insignificance, work only for work's sake. (This is directed against Euripides.) After which, this strong mind may leave seclusion and conclude his life at court, but he will still be indifferent to praise. Thus having learned and then practised to despise the world and reverence only self, he may unconcernedly unmake and remake things. Aristophanes declares that no such ways would suit him; he must have life to show up and make fun of, and is made happy when Iostephanos (Athens) tells him of fresh events he can pounce upon with his wit and satire. Here he grows more sober again, and asks Balaustion if she can detect in him why he should receive the stigma of being called "wine-lees-poet." She would call it style, perhaps. He defends himself from such an imputation by saying he is less obscene than some, while he has elegance and pungency; and, besides, is supported by precedent, Comedy having started in his grandfather's time, and upon those who preceded him he will be proud to graft his powers. He complains that he gets little protection from the Archon, who lays down laws against personalities in Comedy, cuts down the expense for the sake of Tragedy. He rails against the Tragic poet with his trilogies, and a fourth satyric drama just thrown in to please the people. He makes fun of Euripides especially for the kind of satyric dramas he writes, stuffed with

sophistry, etc., and his vanity is evidently much wounded by the fact that Euripides never took any notice of his gibes. If he noticed any one, it would be Aischulos or Sophokles. Does Balaustion think he likes to accept such a measurement, to be classed simply a Comic poet when he had written such a play as "The Birds"? Pleased with Balaustion's smile of sympathy, he tells how he answered in his mind those who had designated him "wine-lees-poet;" namely, that he, by refining on the old, will take his admirers from the lower to higher forms of Comedy but with his lips he tells them they shall have "Grasshoppers" next year. He next describes this play, in which he declares there was no sort of sin against good taste, and only as much satire as was necessary. He is prevented by Balaustion from enlarging upon the satiric portions, and exclaims that only because he loathes these evils as much as she, does he tell them to her. But this piece of pattern-purity failed, and Ameipsias won the victory. So he concluded not to try any more such experiments, but took his old play and furbished it up with improvements suited to the taste of his admirers, and won the prize. He now recurs to the scene of the supper, and tells how, just as they were praising him for his scourging of Euripides, there came a knock, and Sophokles entered and announced that his chorus would commemorate the death of Euripides next month at the Greater Feast by appearing in black and ungarlanded. After a moment of stupor the feasters broke out in unsympathetic talk of the occurrence, but now that Euripides was dead Aristophanes realized his value.

He saw that Euripides had meanings well worth stating. Even their quarrel about dramatic methods was seen in a new light, and he recalls how Euripides had spoken to him when he brought out his "Plutos," urging him not to squander his genius, but, discarding the beast, to paint men as they think and act. Such a drama Euripides foresaw, but could not himself

perfect, now that his life was lived. But though he thought Aristophanes was retrograding, he said farewell to him as a friend, since he would not be estranged from any one with such genius, however it might be degraded. The Archon, noticing the mood of Aristophanes as these memories and thoughts passed through his mind, was about to close the feast, when one of the feasters made a speech in favor of the Comic Muse as the "Good Genius," which, by dwelling upon all that is ugly and loathsome in life, and ridiculing it so as to raise laughter, suggests by contrast perfection which may be imagined, and therefore the transiency of evil, or if not transient in this world, at least lifted up through the pleasure derived from it in Comedy. But Aristophanes stopped the applause, and made a speech for the Tragic Muse as the "Good Genius." She represents men as they are, struggling by means of passion and will, realizing that strength is latent in weakness, yet ever recognizing the power of fate, and trusting in truth which shall shame back all falseness. He would have them pour a libation to Euripides who ministered to this Muse, and himself would drop a tear — no woman's tribute, but a symbol of some god's superabundance of desire, some sacrifice of love beyond power of performance on this narrow sphere. The feasters took the speech as a jest, and praised Aristophanes for turning the Tragic into the Comic. Aristophanes, instead of disillusionizing them, regained his ordinary wits, and fell in with their mood.

He proposed now a libation to the "blended twain," Comedy and Tragedy, and enlarged upon the necessity of both in order to have a perfect manhood. Could he have Euripides back, he would attack him with his worst weapons for preaching with his life-work the sinking of sense in soul, nor would he allow Euripides to be scornfully deaf to his arguments, as he had been, but would demand an answer. But though he is dead, does not some one remain to take his part, with whom

he can have out the argument? Aristophanes bethinks him of Balaustion, who is like a sunset cloud, rosy with the glow of the departed orb, Euripides, and hence the visit to her house.

Addressing Balaustion directly, now, he declares he is not sure that he has repeated his words exactly, and perhaps not a single word as he said it. It may be only her "warm golden eyes" that have carried conviction; anyhow, it was a happy impulse that brought him to her, since she has shown him himself. Balaustion and Euthukles again welcome the glory of Aristophanes, and ask him, if the mood is a lasting one, if he will share in their commemoration of Euripides. Aristophanes looks round and sees the portrait of Euripides, his writing materials, his musical instrument, and last the manuscript of his "Herakles," and breaks out against him again, with a sneer at this unsuccessful play. Balaustion interrupts to warn him that he must show no disrespect to Euripides in her house; that if he should descend from the plane of poetical and witty criticism to that of personal hate against the man, she will interpose. Aristophanes, hardly noticing her remarks, continues that he considers those laws, from Solon down to Sophokles in his "Elektra," against the revilement of the dead to show great obtuseness, for after one is dead, he has immunity from punishment, that is, revilements will not hurt him, which Aristophanes considers very unfair. For example, those who defame him he can punish only while they are alive, but should they die, they slink into a hold over which survivors croak "Respect the dead." And this he needs must, because he can no longer hurt them. But if he could only lend a handful of the dead sense to answer him, he would question them as to what they thought, now that time had tried things.

His way with his enemies had always been to retaliate with such venom that their only concern was to reinstate themselves afterwards. The only drawback to such de-

light is that after he has made a muck-heap of a man (as he had of Euripides), people like Balaustion reinstate him. Euripides, on the other hand, never took any notice of the assaults of his enemies, but probably reasoned that it was not worth while to make notable the small minds who thought to get glory by defaming him. Balaustion here retorts, "Why should men remember that Aristophanes rolled rocks and refuse down on Euripides?" Recording what, anyway? That Aristophanes volleyed muck against him because he wished to extend the bounds of art; that he, a patriot, loving peace, hating war, choosing the rule of the few wise and good, etc., detecting the vice under thought's superstructure, wishing that truth should triumph and falsehood be defeated, volleyed all his soul's supremacy of power against Euripides, who championed the same causes. But Euripides had championed truth not by battering his foe with gibes, and at the same time winking sympathy with him, but by sending thunderbolts which crashed through the vice, showing his only acquaintance with it to be his scorn of it. But these methods displeased Aristophanes, and he left fighting foes to fling mud at his fellow-fighter. But he had missed him, and why should she continue to speak of such shame or refer to the flimsy nature of the taunts of this learned, wise, and witty poet (Aristophanes)? And the tragic end of Comedy, for which Balaustion pities him, is that none believed him. They laughed because they knew what he said of Euripides to be a lie; and what could have set him lying except that he had received some slight from Euripides?

Aristophanes winces under these sharp thrusts of Balaustion, who insinuates that he would attribute her attitude to the fact that she and her husband have but lately come from Rhodes, and do not know the ways of the cultivated in Athens.

Aristophanes now takes up the defence of Comedy in milder vein. It is true to life, which is full of sensu-

ality and passion and foolishness, while Tragedy dwells upon passionless, rational heights. It is coeval with the birth of freedom. He gives an account of the origin of Comedy, which he took as he found it, — a club, fitted for rough chastisement. He would not confine his thrashing, however, to small game, he would strike the sinners against the State, those who would change customs, lead astray the youth, the philosophers, most of all, those who attempted innovation at the theatre, and so on. For such game he needs a club pointed with steel. He claims that his purpose has not been to attack the man in any case, but to attack the principle for which the man stood. And what does Tragedy effect by preaching purity? He urges the preservation of natural life — neither to be gluttonous, not starve oneself; therefore where the Tragedian cries "Peace," he shows up the pleasures that may ensue from peace. What if he does have opposers, and laws passed against vilifying live folk, they all find themselves shorn in the end by his snapping shears. Still he feels that though he has triumphed over his strong opponents, for no Aias (Ajax) can quench the sun's beams by throwing up his shield, his glory may be dimmed by the criticisms of the dullards. He wants something strong and vigorous, while they want a milder sort of amusement or instruction. Instead of joking and ridiculing at the expense of humanity, they want a simple realistic presentation of facts. Aristophanes gives a very unfair illustration of the sort of facts he pretends to think Balaustion and Euthukles would like to exchange for the sturdy healthiness he considers himself the exponent of.

This brings him to the chief point of difference between Euripides and himself. Euripides does not believe in life as a mere revelry of the senses, and cries "death" where Aristophanes cries "life." Instead of realizing happiness, he talks about the empty name.

Does he need, as Balaustion had insinuated, any

particular discourtesy to himself to render his contest with him credible? He has outraged all of him, who stands for the institutions of the past, which Euripides has tried to pummel into insignificance. He follows with an account of the good old times when gods were gods and life was life, and there was such art as that of Pheidias (who carved the Promachos, the statue of Athené on the Akropolis) and Aischulos (who wrote the Oresteia), but a cloud has come over all this glory. Men who call themselves wise, pretend to know about the sun, to tell what virtue is, etc. They disturb all things and establish nothing, and to the questions about the gods declare they are only personifications of natural phenomena, and that necessity alone rules the universe. And Perikles, instead of ordering the arrest of these madmen, bids fools go and learn, as he has, from them. The young men, no longer caring about a life of the senses, follow in the footsteps of these wise men, and argue, fast, and frown. Poetry is the only resource left for saving sense, and changing things back; and in order the better to do it, it should exaggerate the wronged truth, as Aristophanes understands truth, by lending wine a glory it does not possess, and enhancing woman's charm by giving her a diaphanous robe (Saperdion a Kimberic robe). Euripides would reply to all this, that he poetizes philosophy, and would extend rather than restrain; but this means that he would make mere men of heroes, and represent poor men much worse off than they are, use ordinary common speech, in his poetry, and having drawn the sky earthward, proceed to draw earth skyward, by making women and slaves the equals in thinking, saying, doing, of man. And for the gods, instead of abject mien before them, his chorus sings, "May I never scrutinize who made heaven and earth," etc., while he himself will say — Aristophanes here turns to the Herakles manuscript to look for an appropriate quotation from Euripides, and reads something from it, then goes on to point out that since, according

to Euripides, there are no gods and man has no master, therefore there is no right or wrong. Man can do whatever pleases his nature. He might reach freedom in this roundabout way; only in place of gods is "Necessity," and duty is enjoined on all, who must in consequence deny themselves the pleasures which Aristophanes thinks so important a part of life.

It is infamous that Euripides should cast in his lot with the assailants of Apollo. He should have served the Graces, instead of the Furies. He has renounced the roseate world for which he was born, and lives in a world where he finds the false is fact, makes beauty out of ugliness, and where life itself appears to him immortal. The spell of poetry does not work in him to produce the enthusiastic mood which marks a man muse-mad, dream-drunken, etc., because he wants the real, not falsehood. He considers beauty is in all truth somehow, so that the eagle need not lilt like a lark, for strength and utility charm more than grace.

In concluding, he pettishly bids Euripides follow his own devices and please Sokrates and his wife's friend, Kephisophon; but Hellas will have her word to say on the subject, and what is it? He is obliged to admit that Hellas finds the personages of Euripides' plays move as much compassion as tragic types. She likes his homely phrases, allows that he has a right to chop and change a myth. He only makes real again what his predecessor had idealized, — changes back to bull what had been turned into a sphinx. And if the verse is sometimes effeminate, the people feel the lulling influence of it. He is not even content with this, however, and proceeds to confuse the issues between right and wrong, by subjecting them to argument and bringing forth all the points on both sides, so that one cannot tell which is right and which is wrong.

So he triumphed, though he rarely gained the prize. Unmoved by his lack of success, Euripides would gravely walk off, and at a wink and whisper from

Sokrates break out into a smile. Those who had taken the prize would look queer, and foreigners would be surprised at the choice of the Athenians, while Archelaos called the Athenians effete and invited Euripides to Makedonia. Aristophanes, observing how this poison tree was gaining influence, decided to dare the adventure of rooting it out wth his Comic steel.

He asks Balaustion here if she thinks he had not considered in his youth with what class he should cast in company, and whether he should not choose Tragedy instead of Comedy as his means of expression. But his soul was bade to fight because he was opposed to the democratic tendencies of his time, the sophistical philosophy, and the burning desire to have *anything* new in place of the old. Considering how he could cure all this, he decided that polished Tragedy would not be a good weapon to hack and hew against the abominations of the time, so chose the Comic weapon, with its possibilities of directing hate against the enemy, calling him names and making him generally ridiculous. And all this hate finds tolerance among the people because they venerate him for praising the customs and habits that cluster about the worship of Bacchus.

The Tragic writers have shirked their duty in not using Comedy, though they have conformed to the taste of the multitude to the extent of tacking on a satyric play to their Trilogies; but your Still-at-itch, the innovator, Euripides, does not condescend to write more than five altogether, and presumes to make "Alkestis" pass for a satyr play because Herakles gets drunk in it.

See what *he* has accomplished with Comedy! Sparta has been humbled and peace is in sight, demagoguism is crushed, and the government of the many by the few wise and good who have been properly born and bred is about to be reinstated. He would have those fantastic thinkers who have sided with the low and vile, and who might have helped with their brains to preserve

the high and rare, flogged; the fellows that inflame the multitude, — Sokrates crying, "Understand," Aristullos, "Argue," and Euripides informing them, "There are no gods."

He reassures Balaustion that he is not for strangling such offenders straight. He would just dose them with Comedy, hurl words and nicknames at them. He acknowledges that every word about Euripides looked at close is a lie; but stand at a distance and look through the words, and the truth is seen. Grant that he hates any one with reason, he must fight his foe, and he must employ the means which will hurt him most. If he were to match argument with argument such as would carry conviction to a mind like Balaustion's or his own, he would have no effect on the populace, who would merely take in that two adversaries differed, without knowing what was right, which wrong. But if he makes fun of his foe by concocting amusing and untrue stories about him, the populace will be influenced in their judgment against that foe and give the verdict against his work that Aristophanes wants. So will be accomplished by lies the truth he was aiming for.

Thus, he declares to Balaustion, all the difference between them is summed up; and do they differ so very much, after all? His methods for instructing the masses would not be needed for himself or intimates. And had he not been quite as daring as Euripides in his presentation of the gods, having introduced the whole company as creatures too absurd for scorn itself? In his very next play he means to hold Bacchus himself up to ridicule, the chorus taking care all the while to sing his glory, that men may recognize a god in the abused and pummelled beast; and if any spectator show revolt, the priest himself shall cry, "Back, barbarian! Bacchus bids his followers play the fool, and there 's no fooling like a majesty mocked at." Therefore any one who mocks the god obeys the law; and should any

one impute indiscretion to the law, why, the spirit of Euripides is abroad in the world. Nor will he stop here. Hermes is to be treated in a similar fashion.

Of Sophokles he will say nothing beyond a word or two of harmless parody, because he founded no anti-school, but lives and lets live, and loves wine.

His last word is that he accepts the old, and contests the strange. The work of the past which beat the world and still exists in evidence, he swears by until it is ousted by new lives and new work. He will show in a play how his just Judge will award godship to the creature that keeps from yelling longest when he is badly beaten. Such may be cruel methods of deciding, but who asked them to enter the contest? If those whose instincts grasp the new, want to dominate, he who believes in the old rebels, and a fight must follow; and the only way to decide which is stronger is to see who will hold out longest in an "adverse world." If this is hard on the victors as well as the beaten, we must acknowledge that even the victor who winces at this treatment has something of man's nature as well as God's nature in him. He would do away with the few who live in some exclusive sphere, and stand up for common coarse-as-clay existence.

He calls upon Euripides to own he is beaten, or if Balaustion does not agree to this, he invites her to use her rosy strength in defence. He has not done his utmost with her, but he begs her let out her whole rage and not imagine that he will mind it at all. Fancy herself one of his contemporaries in Comedy and pound away.

Balaustion, after a little by-talk with Euthukles, in which she shows a modest disinclination to report her answer to Aristophanes, concludes that speech may still serve a purpose. She replies to Aristophanes that she prefers to remain herself, mindful of what a mere mouse she is in comparison with him. How can she be anything but trustful of the means when he aims at such

a result as he claims for his songs! All judge the results; the means should only be scrutinized by those who are constant in the faith that only good works good. She must accept the means since graced with such plain good; and should the end become the means for still loftier ends, though it is hard to understand the good, and the bad does seem predominant, she will not forget which order it is (Comedy) that bears the burden and toils to win the great reward, so meantime claims her faith. Being a mere woman, she dislikes to use rough strokes; moreover she is a foreigner, and has not the opportunity to drink at every breath some particular doctrine which will best explain the strange thing she revolts against, where everything is represented by its opposite, where what promises death turns out to be the force for good which disperses antagonistic ill. Shall she dare to impugn this institution Comedy, which helps the legislator, the moralist; which is sanctioned, not only by the long recorded roll of triumphs, but by the multitude of to-day who crowned Aristophanes this morning?

In the larger stage of life conventions differ, and she, a stranger, may blame unjustly, through not referring to the particular laws that hold in that place, — may, unobservant or experienceless, not know that trees if strong may bend their boughs without lying prostrate; so it would be charitable for her to conclude, when she is astounded at the natives' acquiescence in muck changed by prescription to gold, that they are able to bring away much of good and true from his plays, themselves uncontaminated. She then imagines some far-off untutored island, perhaps those Kassiterides whither a philanthropic god steers a bark laden with gifts in the future; and when the natives are asked what they think of the Greek works of art, such strangers may judge feebly, expecting to see the statues and pictures conform to their own conventions. Then the Immortal will instruct their ignorance; but suppose they should detect

something which was truly a blemish, then who can doubt that the Immortal would own it and declare the blot escaped the artist.

She continues by asking if a stranger may tax one peccant part in him, three parts godlike. In the first place, is it true that Comedy is a prescription and a rite, and did it rise with freedom? She brings forward arguments to show that Comedy is of comparatively recent origin; hence Hellas knew freedom long before its advent. Nor did it break forth as divine gifts are wont to do, crystal pure, but started as a clown's diversion, and every successor paddled in the slush, until Aristophanes changed buffoonery for wit, and generally purified it so that it soared upward, and the mud subsided to dust. From this it appears that Aristophanes himself was the inventor of it, so that its authorization by antiquity may be done away with. Everywhere he has altered old to new, and not passed on intact what he received intact; therefore it must stand or fall by its intrinsic worth. What is its worth, and what is its aim and object? She enumerates these aims as already given by himself, and declares that they show forth the unexampled excellence of their first author. Euripides had, however, written a hundred plays before Aristophanes gave earth enlightenment with his "Banqueters" or "Babylonians." She will summon the plays of Euripides as his defence.

Was Aristophanes the first to praise peace? As well say that Eurustheus performed the labors of Herakles; and she quotes a passage on peace from Euripides' play of "Kresphontes." It would be easy to multiply instances from his plays where all virtues have been panegyrized, all vices stigmatized, and Hellas bettered before Aristophanes was even a youth. And, moreover, Euripides' praise was not of the Aristophanes kind, that mocks the praise with an admixture of blame, nor his blame the kind that gloats over the vice and laughs while it frowns. He discharged his love unalloyed by

hate earnestly upon things worthy of love, and his hate unalloyed, upon things worthy of hate. There is no novelty in the doctrines of either, for what man in all Hellas is such an imbecile as to declare that war is good, peace hateful, litigation desirable, because war and going to law are sometimes forced upon them as at Marathon? To this, Aristophanes would reply that for one who wants war for conscience' sake, there are crowds of hypocrites who want it for personal ambition and greed. Reproof showered on them would fall like a universal thin dew, from which they could protect themselves with a parasol (skiadeion). He would collect all his force and dash it at one evildoer, and instead of showing that war was evil, would prove Lamachos absurd, — always presenting the concrete by making a butt of the individual, instead of denouncing the wrong in the abstract. With the chorus crying "Hence impure!" he presents the impure, because earnestness is never more earnest than when it dons indifference; so there is much laughing. But this is compensated for when the multitude fines Lamachos, banishes Kleon, burns Sokrates, which they would never have done through the finer play of wit on their pates; therefore, in dealing with them, you must "club drub" the callous numskulls. Beat into their brains that here they have a hater of the three beyond all doubt; and if you would win them to ascend to peace, tickle them by presenting to them the sensual pleasures they may indulge in in times of peace.

Aristophanes having indicated that she has understood his argument, she continues that such policy, no matter what its purpose, proves absurd in practice. It prevents henceforth any sober, effective work against the evil, and renders useless rightful praise of thing or person. Aristophanes' manner of blaming is more like cursing, till those who merely blame must blush. Has a single one of his foes fallen through his belaboring? None that Balaustion knows of, and she points out how

they all continued in their evil ways. The most he has done is to mud-stain them, and their fall will depend upon some future spirit-thrust of lightning — truth!

To the question as to whether his praise has helped his friends more than his blame has hurt his foes, she contends that had his praise of peace effected anything, Leonidas would have turned tail at Thermopulai, for the sake of cakes and dancing-girls. She will consider Comedy triumphant when a Miltiades shall shirk Marathon, or Themistokles swap Salamis for — cake. The present war began twenty-five years ago; so his pleas for peace have not brought about any very quick result.

Nor has his particular method of decrying the law cured a love for law-suits.

And how does his new improve upon the old? The old was rough, but it was at least truthful, while lies are the chief weapons of Aristophanes, his master-stroke being to call a poet-rival a stranger. This is such an easy trick that his rivals have retorted by calling him stranger. Why must all the Comics take stand on lower ground than truth from first to last? etc. Who would stoop so low as gravely to repel such onslaughts? Aristophanes' own adherents whisper, when his lies are too outrageous and palpable, "Our poet means no mischief," "Ribaldry here implies a compliment," for he deals with things, not men, and uses men simply as figure-heads, not meaning to include the whole ship in his invective. This, then, is Comedy, instead of being what Aristophanes claims it to be; it is framed and fitted to suck life dry of life, since life is truth.

He who is so indignant at the Sophists for their examination into right and wrong, and shouts, "There 's but a single side to man and thing, a side so much more big than thing or man can be," does not himself believe it. The Sophists, at least, expect their pupils to believe and practise what they teach. But Aristophanes does not expect his pupils to follow what he teaches, and, as a matter of fact, the very people he launches his wit at

are amused at his lies about them. It would seem as if the law he had laid down for himself was that he must tell lies aforethought and on purpose. For example, he declares that he has purified Comedy of all the old satyr-jokes, clap-trap, and does not condescend to throw barley-corns to the crowd to scramble for; that he ceases to attack a foe once dead, and does not punish age. Then in his very next play he does all those things which he had declared he would not do. What improvement is there on his predecessors except that he lies more audaciously!

She concludes by pointing out that Aristophanes possessed undoubted genius, but not especially in his satyric inventions, nor in the elegance of his style, nor in the wealth of his artistic fancy, for his brother Comedians had equalled and often excelled him in all these points. Instead of fostering that genius, his plays showed a steady deterioration from first to last, when he might have made Comedy and Tragedy combine in such a manner as to show life of to-day as the Tragedies of Euripides showed the life of long ago. The mob might not crown such a feat, but why should crowning be the reward sought?

Finally, the question is, which has succeeded, Aristophanes or Euripides, supposing the aim of both to be striving for the same results, though by different methods? Aristophanes has been at work for twenty-five years, and peace is not yet declared, and the war may go on till Athens falls and freedom with it. Euripides spoke over the heads of the people to a dim future, and if he fails then, they will be fellows in adversity. But this is not likely to be the fate of wise words launched on their voyage. She tells Aristophanes that his kind wishes also accompany the sail on its way, for his nature is kingly. All other aspects of his nature are to her mere pretension, and not the real potentate. She recognizes behind these phantom externals the true poet's power, else she would never have dared make this

appeal. She trusts truth's inherent kingliness, and that he shall one day reign royally when the false is purged from the true. Nor would she have made the appeal did not the other king stand in the grand investiture of death.

Then they both knelt to Euripides, after which she bade him go; but he broke out, saying that better homage to Euripides would be a direct defence of him, in place of mild admonishment of himself. She replied that the best defence would be to read the play Euripides had given her.

**Herakles.** The argument of the play is briefly as follows: Herakles returns to Thebes, after an absence during which he had engaged in various exploits, and finds Lukos in possession of the throne and on the point of slaying his wife, Megara, and his children. He slays the tyrant, and is then seized with madness, at the instigation of Juno, and murders his wife and children under the impression that they are relatives of his taskmaster, Eurustheus. On coming to his senses, he meditates suicide; but is comfronted by the advice of Theseus, with whom he goes to Athens in order to obtain expiation.

**Conclusion.** At the close of the reading of "Herakles," Aristophanes is set musing by the last words of the chorus, —

> "The greatest of all our friends of yore
> We have lost for evermore,"

and he wonders whether Euripides or himself was the best friend of Athens. Certainly much can be said for stripping wisdom bare, like the undraped statue of Pallas recently made by Lachares. He comes to the conclusion, however, that he himself is the best friend. Illustrating by the popular game of Kottabos, he declares that Euripides was fixed within a globe, and could only get light from one hole, that of the High and Right, while he revolves in the globe, passing succes-

sively every hole, and so gets knowledge of the Low and Wrong. Since these exist and are natural, he is twice as great as the one who knows only one phase of life. When Balaustion's imaginary third appears in the Tin Islands, perhaps, and contrives, he does n't know how, to take in every side at once, he shall be hailed the superior of both of them. Meantime he, in following out truthfully his bent, is also "best friend" of Athens. If he had half done his work, that were failure, but he has not emulated Thamuris, the poet who was punished for rash strife with the powers above who saw with sight beyond his vision. The picture of Thamuris, as Sophokles represented him, is to be seen in the Poikilé at Athens, he tells Balaustion. Here he takes Euripides' psalterion, and sings a lyric of Thamuris. The song breaks up in a laugh, and he declares he has sung content back to himself, and started a subject for a play beside. He gives himself a last characteristic pat on the shoulder by boasting of what he will do in his next play, and how peace will soon be proclaimed as the result of his teachings, and bids the brave couple farewell until next year.

Balaustion remarks that no doubt one of the stories he referred to had its truth, namely, that evil is evil to him who thinks it so. And Aristophanes went off in the rose-streaked morning-gray. But next year the peace looked forward to by Aristophanes was not realized. It brought, first, the death of Sophokles, after which Iophon brought out his father's play of "Oidipous;" then Aristophanes was triumphant with his "Frogs," which she describes as a play, in Mrs. Orr's words, flashing with every variety of his genius — as softly musical in the mystics' chorus as croaking in that of the frogs — in which Bacchos himself is ridiculed, and Euripides is more coarsely handled than ever." And at the second performance of this popular play at the great Feast, the battle of Aigispotamoi having been fought, the Spartans suddenly pounced upon Athens,

and the first word of the conqueror was that the long walls connecting Peiraios with the city should be destroyed. Three days the people hesitated in stupor at the command. Then the Spartans, after a council of war, repeated the order, not only that the walls were to be levelled, but that the whole city was to be laid waste; but a man of Phokis arose, her husband, Euthukles, and sang a choric song from the "Elektra" of Euripides, and the hearts of the assembled enemy were touched, and they cried in strange friendliness, "Reverence Elektra," and "Let stand Athenai." They were probably mindful, Balaustion thinks, of the incidents in Elektra's story which she recalls. The Spartans, however, changed their minds the next morning. They permitted Athens itself to be saved by Tragedy, but pulled down the long walls under the auspices of Comedy. There was nothing now but flight for Balaustion and Euthukles. Help came to them in their need, for the old mariner, whose ship she had saved, lay in the harbor, and he was glad to return the compliment and save her and her Euripides. And now Euripides lies buried in the little valley. She has sent his tablets and psalterion to the King of Syracuse. The young poet Philemon she hopes will follow in the footsteps of Euripides, who, he is to believe, still lives. The winds and the waves sing of his immortality, and as they approach Rhodes take up the chorus, "There are no gods! Glory to God — who saves Euripides."

The scene of this poem is laid at the end of the Peloponnesian war, which had lasted for twenty-seven years, and now finally Athens was conquered by Sparta. During those years the war between Tragedy and Comedy had been waged, and had centred in the abuse showered upon Euripides by Aristophanes. Balaustion undertakes the defence of Euripides against Aristophanes' defence of himself which Browning has based upon his plays and upon Greek criticism of him.

The poem presents such a complete picture of Aris-

tophanes that it is hardly necessary to give any further information in regard to him. His birthplace is not definitely known, though the most likely accounts say that he was a son of Philippos, a native of Ægina. The dates of his birth and death are also unknown. (For references to the opinions of classical critics as to Browning's presentation of the character and the criticism of his work implied, see Introduction to this volume.)

The charming incident of Euthukles saving the city by reciting a song from the "Elektra" and the subsequent demolition of the long walls to the flute-music of the dancing-girls is drawn from Plutarch, who tells the incident in his Life of Lysander, the Spartan general. The poet hit upon the happy thought of making the "man from Phokis" the husband of the child of his imagination, Balaustion.

"Lysander, as soon as he had taken all the ships except twelve, and the walls of the Athenians, on the sixteenth day of the month Munychion, the same on which they had overcome the barbarians at Salamis, then proceeded to take measures for altering the government. But the Athenians taking that very unwillingly and resisting, he sent to the people and informed them that he found that the city had broken the terms, for the walls were standing when the days were past within which they should have been pulled down. He should therefore consider their case anew, they having broken their first articles. And some state, in fact, the proposal was made in the congress of the allies, that the Athenians should all be sold as slaves; on which occasion, Erianthus, the Theban, gave his vote to pull down the city, and turn the country into sheep-pasture; yet afterwards, when there was a meeting of the captains together, a man of Phocis, singing the first chorus in Euripides' *Electra*, which begins,

> 'Electra, Agamemnon's child, I come
> Unto thy desert home,'

they were all melted with compassion, and it seemed to be a cruel deed to destroy and pull down a city which had been so famous, and produced such men.

"Accordingly Lysander, the Athenians yielding up everything, sent for a number of flute-women out of the city, and collected together all that were in the camp, and pulled down the walls, and burned the ships to the sound of the flute; the allies being crowned with garlands, and making merry together, as counting that day the beginning of their liberty. He proceeded also at once to alter the government, placing thirty rulers in the city, and ten in the Piræus; he put also a garrison into the Acropolis, and made Callibius, a Spartan, the governor of it."

**1.** *Euthukles:* Balaustion's husband.

**3.** *Athenai:* Athens, capital of Attica.

**9.** *Haides:* a name for Pluto, god of the under world.

**17.** *Olumpos:* mountain in Thessaly, supposed to be the home of the gods.

**18.** *Akropolis:* citadel of Athens.

**19.** *Koré:* virgin; name given to Persephone.

**29.** *Attiké:* Attica, province of the central portion of Greece.

**34.** *Pallas:* a name of Athene, meaning either brandisher of the spear, or a virgin.

**39.** *Dikast:* judge. — *Heliast:* juryman.

**50.** *Philemon:* a poet of the new Comedy, which, instead of indulging in personal satire, aimed more to paint manners. He is said to have been a native of Sicily. Balaustion evidently regards him as a possible exponent of her dramatic ideals. See **Conclusion, 608** fol. It is recorded that he had a high opinion of Euripides. Browning has, however, taken liberties with dates in making him even a young contemporary of Euripides, for he was not born, it seems, until thirty-five years after the death of that poet.

**71.** *Peiraios:* Piræus, harbor of Athens, connected to it by long walls.

80. *Themistoklean:* the Athenian general Themistocles built the Piræus, and planned the fortifications of Athens.

101. *Kordax-step:* an indecent dance.

103. *Perikles:* the celebrated ruler of Athens under whose administration Athens reached its greatest artistic glory. The Athenians gave him the surname Olympian.

109. *Pheidias:* the most distinguished sculptor of Athens in the time of Pericles.

112. *Propulaia:* Propylæa, gateway to the Acropolis.

114. *Pnux:* Pnyx, place for the popular assembly. — *Bema:* place whence speeches were made.

115. *Hellas:* name for Greece, derived from the colonists who first settled there, the sons of Hellen.

119. *Staghunt-month:* March; a festival was held sacred to Diana in this month because it was the time for hunting stags.

120. *Dionusia:* the great feast of Bacchus or Dionysius was held in the spring month, March.

121. *Aischulos, Sophokles, Euripides:* see notes to "Balaustion's Adventure," line 39.

128. *Hermippos to pelt Perikles:* Hermippus was a poet of the Old Comedy, who accused Aspasia, the mistress of Pericles, of impiety.

129. *Kratinos:* a Comic poet, contemporary of Aristophanes. He received the second prize twice when Aristophanes received the first. In this last play, "Hippeis," Aristophanes made fun of Kratinos, who, now in his ninety-fifth year, retaliated in a comedy, "The Flagon," which took the first prize away from Aristophanes.

130. *Eruxis:* a small satirist; see "Frogs," lines 931–944 (Bohn edition).

132. *There 's a dog-faced dwarf*, etc.: probably Anubis, who had the body of a man and the face of a dog.

137. *Momos:* the god of pleasantry, and satirizer of the gods.

**138.** *Makaria:* heroine in the "Heraclidæ" of Euripides, who killed herself for her country's sake. For quotation made from her, see lines 594–596 (Bohn Edition).

**147.** *Furies in the Oresteian song:* Alecto, Tisiphone, and Megara. They hunted Orestes after he murdered his mother. See Æschylus, "Eumenides."

**160.** *The Three:* Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.

**161.** *Klutaimnestra:* Clytemnestra, wife of Agamemnon, mother of Orestes, Iphigenia, and Electra. She murdered Agamemnon on his return from Troy. The reference here is to the "Agamemnon" of Æschylus.

**162.** *Iokasté:* Jocasta, mother and wife of Œdipus, who married her after having killed his father, not knowing who they were. See the "Œdipus the King" of Sophocles. — *Medeia:* daughter of Æetes, King of Colchis, the land of the golden fleece. She helped Jason when he came thither in quest of the golden fleece, and they were wedded, but afterwards he repudiated her and in revenge she killed her children. See the "Medeia" of Euripides.

**171.** *Peplosed and kothorned:* robed and buskined.

**173.** *Choros:* the chorus in the Greek drama was composed of performers wholly distinct from the actors, yet through its leader it often took part in the dialogue. It was supposed to voice the opinions of the public, and consisted either of old men, women, or maidens.

**176.** *Phrunichos:* a dramatic poet, who made the capture of Miletus the subject of a tragedy, "which," says Grote, "when performed (493), so painfully wrung the feelings of the Athenian audience that they burst into tears in the theatre, and the poet was condemned to pay a fine of 1,000 drachmai, as having recalled to them their own misfortunes." Aristophanes derides him in the "Frogs" for his method of introducing his characters.

**178.** *Milesian smart-place:* the painful remembrance of the Persian capture of Miletus.

193. *Admetos:* King of Thessaly. See note "Balaustion's Adventure," page 283.

200. *Galingale:* a flower belonging to the order Marantaceæ. Arrowroot is extracted from the tubers of several species. The flower is mentioned by Theocritus.

202. *Baccheion:* see note "Balaustion's Adventure," line 338.

205. *Lenaia:* one of the Athenian festivals in honor of Bacchus, at which there were dramatic contests.

206 "*Andromedé*": the "Andromeda" of Euripides was brought out in 312 B. C. She was the daughter of Perseus and Cassiopeia, and was exposed to be devoured by a sea monster in order to appease the wounded vanity of the sea nymphs who objected to Cassiopeia's setting her beauty above theirs.

207. "*Kresphontes*": a tragedy of Euripides, of which only fragments remain.

208. *Some one from Phokis:* Euthukles.

214. "*Bacchai*": this play was not acted until after the death of Euripides.

227. *Amphitheos, deity and dung:* a character in the "Acharnians" of Aristophanes — "not a man," "but an immortal." See Acharnians, lines 27–56 (Bohn edition).

261. *Stade:* the *stadium*, on reaching which the runner went back again.

263. *Diaulos:* a double line of the race-course.

278. *Good-naturedly he took on him command:* in his fifty-seventh year Sophocles was one of the ten generals (Pericles and Thucydides being among his colleagues), and served in the war against Samos.

290. *Hupsipule:* Queen of Lemnos. She entertained Jason on his way to Colchis to seek the golden fleece. — "*Phoinissai*": the "Phœnician Virgins," a tragedy of Euripides, which tells of the woes of the house of Œdipus.

292. *Zethos against Amphion:* twin sons of Zeus by

Antiope. They ruled over Thebes together, and Zethos was interested in the practical affairs of the kingdom, while Amphion amused himself with his lyre.

**302.** *Archelaos:* King of Macedonia, who patronized Euripides, and is said to have appointed him one of his ministers. Euripides wrote a play in honor of that monarch, called "Archelaos," of which few fragments survive.

**311.** *Phorminx:* a guitar or harp.

**312.** "*Alkaion*" . . . "*Pentheus*": lost plays of Euripides.

**313.** *One moan Iphigeneia made by Aulis' strand:* "Iphigenia in Aulis," a play by Euripides, written in Macedonia.

**320.** *Mounuchia:* a port of Attica between the Piræus and Sunium.

**325.** *City of Gapers:* a name given to Athens on account of the curiosity of its inhabitants.

**329.** *Kopaic eel:* the eels of Lake Copais, in Bœotia, were a great delicacy, and are still considered so.

**334.** *Arginousai:* three small islands near the shores of Asia Minor, where the Spartan fleet was conquered by the Athenians.

**336.** *Mime:* an actor in the dramatic form of composition called *mimes.*

**337.** *Lais:* a noted courtesan, mistress of Alcibiades.

**338.** *Leogoras:* an Athenian debauchee. — *Koppa-marked:* the best breed of race-horses was marked with the old letter koppa.

**341.** *Choinix:* a liquid measure. — *Mendesian wine:* wine from Mende, a city in Thrace where famous wine was made.

**350.** *Thesmophoria:* a festival in honor of Ceres and Proserpine, held by women alone. Aristophanes made it the subject of his comedy, "Thesmophoriazousai."

**358.** *Krateros:* seems to be an imaginary personage.

**359.** *He was loved by Sokrates:* Socrates and Euripides were on terms of the greatest intimacy.

362. *Arridaios, one Krateues:* minor poets of the time.

364. *Protagoras:* a follower of the Eleatic school of philosophy, which asserted that all matter was made up of atoms in motion, having no property in themselves, but giving the effect of property on the senses through their motion. He was one of the teachers of Euripides (died about 400 B. C.).

365. *Comic Platon:* the last of the school of Old Comedy; only fragments of his work have come down to us.

371. *Nikodikos:* an imaginary person.

374. *Archelaos' pack of hungry hounds:* considered a doubtful tradition, not being mentioned by Aristophanes.

376. "*The Festivals*": evidently a play by Platon.

388. "*Lusistraté*": a play by Aristophanes, in which the women arrange to have peace brought about.

401. *Kleon:* a tanner in Athens, who was a popular demagogue (411 B. C.), and afterwards a general satirized by Aristophanes in "The Knights."

411. *Phuromachos:* a military leader.

420. *By one appalled at Phaidra's fate:* Phædra is a character in Euripides' "Hippolytus." In the next few lines Balaustion defends this play from the strictures of Aristophanes, who, failing to see its moral tendency, considered it an outrage done the public, while he himself presented things that showed a positively depraved taste. In this play Phædra struggles against the love for Hippolytus with which Venus seizes her, and kills herself rather than give way to the feeling. She, however, writes a letter blaming him.

438. *Salabaccho:* a famous courtesan of this time.

450. *Aristeides:* an Athenian citizen called the "Just," and banished 484 B. C. because of his justice. — *Miltiades:* the great Athenian general who conquered the Persian Darius (died 489 B. C.).

451. *A golden tettix in his hair:* the Athenians wore a

golden grasshopper (tettix) in the hair as a badge of honor to indicate that that had sprung from the soil.

**452.** *Kleophon:* an Athenian demogogue.

**491.** *Alkamenes:* a sculptor of Athens, celebrated for beautiful statues of Venus and Vulcan.

**493.** *Thoukudides:* Thucydides, the historian of the Peloponnesian war.

**508.** *Alkestis:* see "Balaustion's Adventure."

**511.** *Herakles:* see transcript from "Alkestis" in "Balaustion's Adventure."

**522.** "*Herakles*": the "Heracles Furens" of Euripides. See translation included in this poem.

**533.** *Eurustheus' bidding:* Heracles undertook his twelve labors at the bidding of his Cousin Eurystheus, but, according to some accounts, not until after he had killed his wife and children.

**540.** *King Lukos:* the King who usurped the throne of Thebes while Heracles was absent, and was about to murder Heracles' wife and children. He is said to have been a son of Neptune, but Euripides says he was a son of an older Lukos or Lycus.

**542.** *Since he saved the land and . . . wedded Megara:* Creon, King of Thebes, was so pleased with the exploits of Heracles in freeing his country from the tribute of a hundred oxen yearly, that he gave him his daughter Megara and intrusted him with the affairs of the kingdom.

**558.** *Amphitruon:* the reputed father of Heracles, who was son of Alcmene, wife of Amphitryon by Zeus.

**562.** *Komos:* a revel.

**564.** *Dionusos, Bacchos, Phales, Iacchos:* all names of Bacchus. See note, "Balaustion's Adventure," line **161.**

**565.** *Kid-skin at his heel:* the goat was sacrificed to Bacchus.

**577.** *Mnesilochos:* father-in-law of Euripides, introduced by Aristophanes in his "Thesmophoriazousai."

**578.** *Toxotes:* an archer in the same play.

588. *Elaphion of the Persic dance:* she was the leader of the female chorus, or flute-players.

598. *Archon:* there were nine archons in Athens, the most important of which was the one who had charge of the domestic affairs of the citizens, etc., and presided over festivals and the theatres.

652. *Helios:* God of the sun.

653. *Pindaros:* Pindar, the great lyric poet of Greece (born 552 B. C.).

662. *Cheekband:* worn by trumpeters to support the cheeks.

663. *Cuckoo-apple:* a poisonous plant that burns the tongue.

664. *Thasian:* from Thasus, an island in the Ægean where famous wine is made.

665. *Threttanelo:* a sound imitative of a stringed instrument, as the harp or cithara.

666. *Neblaretai:* a sound imitative of any joyful cry.

670. *Chrusomelolonthion:* a little cock-chafer, used as a term of endearment. See Flute-girl in Aristophanes' "Wasps."

674. *Artamouxia:* a character in the "Thesmophoriazousai" (Bohn Edition), lines 1202–1223.

675. *Thank Hermes for the lucky throw:* Hermes presided over gambling.

681. *Goat's breakfast:* an indecent allusion.

689. *Bacchos' equivalent*, etc.: ivy was sacred to Bacchus as the laurel or bay was to the sun-god, Phœbus.

692. *Curtail expense:* the Greek chorus was maintained at great expense.

695. *Birds' wings*, etc.: Aristophanes is thinking of his own choruses of birds and wasps.

696. *Three days' salt-fish-slice:* a three days' rations for the soldier, after which he was expected to look out for himself.

697. *Sham-ambassadors:* characters in the "Acharnians;" but here Aristophanes seems to mean actual ambassadors who unsuccessfully sue for peace.

**700.** *Archinos:* a man who distributed new arms among the people of Argus. — *Agurrhios:* an Athenian general and demagogue.

**706.** *Kudathenaian:* native of the deme Kudathenai or Cyd-Athené. — *Pandionid:* of the tribe of Pandionis.

**711.** *Anapæsts:* a verse-foot consisting of two short and one long syllable.

**718.** *Choirilos:* a tragic poet of Athens.

**720.** *How else did that old doating driveller . . . foil me?* see note, line **129.**

**722.** "*Clouds*": a play of Aristophanes.

**725.** "*Willow-wicker-flask*": refers to "The Flagon," the name of the play by Kratinos that took the prize away from Aristophanes.

**765.** *Sophists:* Aristophanes calls every one a sophist who advances views subversive of the old order, especially those who argue for there being good on both sides of a question.

**794.** *Lyric shell or tragic barbiton:* the lesser and the large lyre.

**813.** *Tuphon:* Typhon, a god of the winds and sea.

**830.** *Why may not women act?* the parts of both women and men were taken by men on the Greek stage.

**845.** *Sousarion:* a Greek poet of Megara, who is said to have invented Attic Comedy about 570 B. C.

**847.** *Chionides:* said to be the first writer of Comedy among the Athenians. His representations date from 487 B. C.

**880.** "*Grasshoppers*": play of Aristophanes, now lost, mentioned in the Scholia as "Tettigophoras."

**881.** "*Little-in-the-Fields*": the lesser Festival to Bacchus, celebrated in the autumn in the country, sometimes called on this account "Ta kat' agrous."

**909.** *Ameipsias:* a Comic poet, ridiculed for his insipidity by Aristophanes. He twice took the first prize away from Aristophanes.

**910.** *Salaminian cave:* a cave of Salamis, an island on the coast of Attica.

**937.** *Iostephanos:* violet-crowned, a term applied especially to Athens and the Athenians.

**941.** *Kleophon:* an Athenian demagogue whom Aristophanes attacked as an enemy of peace, and a bad character generally.

**943.** *Dekeleia:* a village north of Athens. — *Klĕonumos:* an Athenian demagogue, who came under the lash of Aristophanes.

**948.** *Melanthios:* a minor Tragic poet.

**951.** *Parabasis:* a portion of the drama at the end, having nothing to do with the action, in which the chorus addressed the audience in the poet's name. Similar to our epilogue.

**958.** "*Wasps*": famous play of Aristophanes.

**963.** *Wine-lees-poet:* the actors in early Comedy used to smear their faces with wine-lees. Æschylus introduced the regular mask. Aristophanes, however, had himself acted the part of Kleon in "The Knights" with his face smeared with wine-lees, because no one could be found to make a mask for Kleon.

**964.** *Telekleides:* an Athenian poet of the Old Comedy (about 444 B. C.).

**965.** *Murtilos, Hermippos:* writers of Comedy.

**966.** *Eupolis:* shared with Aristophanes the honor of being a chief representative of the Old Comedy.

**983.** *Mullos, Euetes:* writers of Comedy in Athens after Sousarion.

**987.** *Morucheides:* an archon of Athens in whose time it was decreed that Comedy should no longer indulge in personal abuse. — *Surakosios:* an Athenian lawyer.

**990.** *Areopagite:* a member of the Court or Senate that met on the hill called the Areopagus, Hill of Mars.

**992.** "*Clouds*": play by Aristophanes.

**996.** *Tragic Trilogy:* a series of three plays, each complete in itself, but connected by historical continuity.

**1006.** *Satyr-play:* a species of dramatic composition which has been described as uniting the pleasantry of

Comedy with the gravity of Tragedy. Its distinctive mark was a chorus of Satyrs. The scene of it was in the country. The "Alkestis" lacks these distinctive marks, except that in the midst of the troubles of Admetus, Heracles is introduced feasting.

**1029.** "*The Birds*": play of Aristophanes.

**1042.** *Alkibiades:* an Athenian general celebrated for his talents and his weaknesses.

**1043.** *Triphales:* the wearer of a three-plumed helmet. Aristophanes wrote a play with this title, which was directed against Alcibiades. — *Trilophos:* the wearer of a three-crested helmet.

**1047.** *Autochthon-brood:* belonging to the soil, which the Athenians claimed, and wore the golden tettix in sign of it.

**1053.** *Taügetan:* a mountain near Sparta.

**1064.** *A, b, g:* the first three letters of the Greek alphabet, alpha, beta, gamma.

**1066.** *Ruppapai:* a cry of the Athenian rowers, equivalent to "yoho."

**1078.** *Mitulené:* the capital of Lesbos, famous for learning.

**1080.** *Anticipating Oidipous*, etc.: Œdipus put out his own eyes when he found he had unwittingly married his mother. Browning here puts in the mouth of Aristophanes the nursery rhyme of the man who jumped into a hedge and scratched out his eyes, and then scratched them in again.

**1082.** *Phaidras:* see note, line **420**. — *Augé:* unwittingly was about to marry her own son, but was prevented by a portent. Euripides portrayed her in a play that has been lost. — *Kanaké:* fell in love with her brother.

**1084.** *Marathon:* the battle in which the Athenians conquered the Persians; stands here for a manly spirit.

**1085.** *Antistrophé:* the Greek chorus was divided in half — one half called the strophe, the other the antistrophe.

**1109.** *Bald-head here, Aigina's boast:* Aristophanes, whose birthplace is said to have been Aigina or Ægina.

**1115.** *Prutaneion:* Prytaneion, a large hall at Athens where the magistrates feasted with those who rendered services to the country.

**1120.** *Ariphrades:* a player on the harp, and attacked by Aristophanes in the Parabasis of "The Wasps" as an infamous character.

**1134.** *Karkinos and his dwarf-crab-family:* Comic actor and his famous dancing sons.

**1143.** *Exomis:* a woman's garment.

**1148.** *Parachoregema:* subordinate chorus, which sings in the absence of the principal one. The play has such a chorus, but Aristophanes speaks of putting in a full chorus of men to occupy the stage at the same time as the women's chorus. In the description of the play that follows here Browning evidently chose to consider the play as we have it now, to be the form that was acted first, and himself puts into the mouth of Aristophanes the improvements made on its second appearance.

**1150.** *Aristullos:* the character satirized by Aristophanes, and used in one of his plays, "The Ecclesiazousai," as a travesty of Plato. This incident, and Plato's amused indifference, are mentioned at line **3316** of the "Apology."

**1151.** *His plan how womankind should rule the roast:* refers to the position of equality given women by Plato in his "Republic." The "Republic" was not yet written, but the ideas belonged to the time, and had very likely been expressed by Plato.

**1156.** *Mnesilochos:* father of Euripides' first wife, a character in the "Thesmaphoriazousai."

**1165.** *Toxotes:* a Scythian archer in the play of the "Thesmaphoriazousai," who acts the part of a policeman.

**1168.** *Kalligeneia:* the bearer of fair offspring, the name by which Ceres was addressed in the festival to her.

**1182.** *Lusandros:* Lysander, the Spartan general who commanded the forces against Athens.

**1183.** *Euboia penitent:* the island of Eubœa was not friendly to the Athenian confederation.

**1185.** *The Great King's Eye:* a mocking name given to the Persian ambassador, Pseudartabus, in Aristophanes' "Acharnians."

**1187.** *Kompolakuthes:* bully-boaster, with a play on the name of Lamachus, a boastful warrior, as portrayed in the "Acharnians."

**1189.** *Strattis:* a Comic poet.

**1191.** *Klepsudra:* klepsydra, a water-clock.

**1193.** *Sphettian vinegar:* vinegar from the village of Sphettus.

**1194.** *Silphion:* a plant used as a relish.

**1200.** *Kleonclapper:* corrector of Kleon; in the play "The Knights," Kleon is called the Paphlagonian.

**1205.** *Agathon:* an Athenian poet, very lady-like in appearance as described in the "Thesmaphoriazousai."

**1208.** *Babaiax:* an exclamation indicating surprise.

**1220.** *My Choros . . . shall, clothed in black, appear ungarlanded:* this is a historical incident.

**1234.** *Told him in dream:* the account of Sophocles' dream may be found in Cicero, in the "Divinatio," xxv. "To the philosophers we may add the testimony of Sophocles, a most learned man, and as a poet quite divine, who, when a golden goblet of great weight had been stolen from the temple of Heracles, saw in a dream the god himself appearing to him, and declaring who was the robber. Sophocles paid no attention to this vision, though it was repeated more than once. When it had presented itself to him several times, he proceeded up to the Court of the Areopagus, and laid the matter before them. On this, the judges issued an order for the arrest of the offender nominated by Sophocles. On the application of the torture, the criminal confessed his guilt, and restored the goblet; from which event

this temple of Heracles was afterwards called 'The Temple of Heracles, the Indicator.' "

**1235.** *Akropolis:* the citadel of Athens.

**1239.** "*Medeia*": a play of Euripides. — *That play yielded palm to Sophokles; and he . . . to . . . Euphorion:* this refers to the fact that "Medea" took only third prize in a contest, in which Euphorion, the son of Æschylus, took first, and Sophocles second prize.

**1245.** *Trugaios:* Tragæas, character in the play "Peace."

**1247.** *Simonides:* a celebrated poet of Kos, said to be the first poet who wrote for money, and to have borne the character of an avaricious man.

**1250.** *Philonides:* a Comic poet. He brought out several of Aristophanes' plays. — *Kallistratos:* another Comic poet, who also brought out plays of Aristophanes.

**1255.** *Asklepios:* Æsculapius, son of Apollo, and god of medicine. That Sophocles received him is traditional.

**1256.** *His own estate lies fallow:* Sophocles neglected his property.

**1257.** *Iophon:* a son of Sophocles, who tried to prove that his father was an imbecile, when he gained the case by reading his "Œdipus at Colonus," which he had recently written.

**1308.** "*Ploutos*": a play of Aristophanes, an example of the "Middle Comedy," which followed upon the decree that personal ridicule should be no longer allowed in Comedy.

**1330.** *Antiope:* wife of Theseus in a play of Euripides now lost. Some as Hippolyta.

**1333.** *Maketis:* capital of Macedonia.

**1340.** *Pentelikos:* marble from the mountain of that name in Attica.

**1380.** *Lamachos:* the "Great captain of the day" was killed before Syracuse, 414 B. C. See note, line **1187.**

**1382.** *Philokleon:* love-Cleon, character in "The Wasps," contrasted with Bdelukleon (Loathe Cleon).

**1385.** *Paphlagonian:* see note, line **1200.**

**1387.** *Pisthetairos:* a character in "The Birds." — *Strepsiades:* a character in "The Clouds."

**1412.** *Hippolutos:* Hippolytus, the chaste hero of Euripides' play of that name. See note, line **420.**

**1413.** *Ariphrades:* see note, line **1120.**

**1414.** *Bellerophon:* lost play of Euripides.

**1415.** *Kleonumos:* a character in "Peace."

**1416.** *Theseus:* in the play "Hippolytus."

**1417.** *Alkibiades:* Alcibiades; he is introduced in "The Clouds" as Pheidippides.

**1439.** *Sokrates would question us, with buzz of how and why:* an apt description of the dialectic methods of Socrates in discussion.

**1456.** *Nikias:* the Athenian general who failed in the expedition against Syracuse was of a superstitious nature.

**1461.** *Alalé:* a war-cry.

**1482.** *Hermai:* statues of Hermes placed over the doors of houses to symbolize the combination of soul and sense. It was considered sacrilege to deface them, as had been recently done.

**1505.** *Lais when she met thee in thy walks:* see "Conclusion," line **241.**

**1559.** *Sophroniskos' son:* Socrates.

**1570.** *Tablets smeared with treacherous wax:* there were various materials used for writing, of which this was one. The *Papuros* was a sort of paper made from the fibres of the Egyptian papyrus.

**1581.** *Daimon:* the presiding deity of the household.

**1609.** *Solon:* the great law-giver of Athens.

**1612.** *Elektra . . . scruple to blame:* see Euripides, "Electra," lines 866–904 (Bohn Edition).

**1622.** *Olympiad:* the Olympic games were celebrated every five years, and were so important that time came to be reckoned by Olympiads.

**1670.** *Immerded:* covered with filth.

**1682.** *Well, 't was no dwarf he heaved Olumpos at:*

reference to Zeus' battle with the Titans, whom he conquered with his thunders and earthquakes.

**1739.** *Kephisophon:* a friend of Euripides, who was reported to have helped him in his plays.

**1852.** *Palaistra:* a wrestling-school originally; afterwards a school for mental development.

**1874.** *Whirligig:* stands for Vortex, which is used in derision of Socrates in "The Clouds," where he is represented as setting up this blind force in place of Zeus.

**1885.** *Chairephon:* a friend of Socrates. See Plato. He is portrayed as such in "The Clouds."

**1906.** *Kameirensian:* an inhabitant of Camirus, a city in the island of Rhodes. — *Aiginete:* from the island of Ægina, where Aristophanes was said to have been born. He evidently liked to pass for an Athenian.

**1907.** *Lindian:* from Lindus, a city of Rhodes.

**1915.** *Aias:* Ajax, one of the heroes of the Trojan war.

**1928.** *Thearion:* evidently an imaginary person. The lines following are descriptive of the Middle Comedy, which paints life as it is, looked at from Aristophanes' un-ideal point of view.

**1933.** *San:* a letter used to distinguish race horses.

**1934.** *Menippos:* there is a Comic poet of that name. Here he is not meant, but an imaginary importer of horses.

**1935.** *Kepphê:* imaginary.

**1936.** *Sporgilos:* imaginary.

**1940.** *Weasel-lap:* weasels are fond of innocuous diet like milk and eggs.

**1941.** *Cheiron:* Centaur, who brought up Heracles.

**1947.** *Rocky Ones:* Athenians.

**1959.** *Peparethian:* famous wine from Paparethus, on the coast of Macedonia.

**1981.** *Themistokles:* commander of the Greeks at the battle of Salamis, 480 B. C.

**1983.** *Odusseus:* Odysseus, the hero of the Trojan war, whose wanderings, on his return, are the subject of the "Odyssey."

**1987.** *Theognis:* poet, lived about 550 B. C., a link between Pindar, 490 B. C., and Homer, 1000 B. C.

**2010.** *Aphrodité:* Venus.

**2018.** *Promachos:* defender or champion. The bronze statue of *Athene Promachus* is here referred to, which was erected from the spoils taken at Marathon, and stood between the Propylæa and the Erechtheum: the proportions of this statue were so gigantic that the gleaming point of the lance and the crest of the helmet were visible to seamen on approaching the Piræus from Sunium.

**2019.** *Oresteia:* Trilogy of Æschylus, "Agamemnon," "Choëphoræ," "Eumenides."

**2026.** *Gor-crow:* carrion crow.

**2028.** *Kimon:* son of Miltiades: he was a famous Athenian general, and was banished by the *Boulé*, or council of state.

**2033.** *Prodikos:* a Sophist and rhetorician of Cos, teacher of Euripides and Socrates. He was put to death by the Athenians on the score of his corrupting the youth. He is satirized in "The Birds" and "Clouds."

**2035.** *Tripods' way:* so called because on the buildings or pillars in it tripods were erected, which had been won as prizes in musical and dramatic contests.

**2036.** *This empty noddle comprehends the sun, — How he 's Aigina's bigness:* Anaxagoras thought the sun was of inflammable matter, about as big as the Peloponnesus.

**2045.** *Kottabos:* a game which was played in various forms, in all of which the point was to throw wine in a skilful manner from one vessel into another.

**2047.** *Choes:* (a pouring) libation to the gods, especially funeral libations. Here a Festival of Libations. It was held in honor of Bacchus.

**2054.** *Leda, as a swan, Europa, as a bull:* Zeus transformed himself into a swan when he wooed Leda, and into a bull when he wooed Europa.

**2061.** *Theoros:* a Comic poet.

**2064.** *Zeus, who 's but the atmosphere,* etc.: this

rationalistic explanation of the natural origin of the gods was due, in the first place, to Theognis of Rhegium, 600 years B. C.

**2077.** *Anaxagoras:* a philosopher and astronomer, teacher of Euripides and Socrates, and consulted frequently by Pericles.

**2085.** *Brilesian:* honey from Brilessus, a mountain of Attica.

**2100.** *Plataian help:* prompt assistance. Proverbial expression derived from the fact that the Platæans furnished a thousand soldiers to help the Athenians at Marathon.

**2105.** *Saperdion:* a term of endearment derived from a salted fish called saperdes. Here the name of a famous Hetaira (female comrade). — *Empousa:* a hobgoblin.

**2113.** *Kimberic:* transparent.

**2152.** *A-sitting with my legs up:* this expression is used of Euripides in the "Acharnians" and elsewhere.

**2210.** *Kuthereia:* Cytherea, name of Venus derived from the island Cythera, where she was received after her birth from the sea-foam.

**2225.** *Plethron square:* 100 feet square.

**2240.** *Chiton:* the chief garment of the Athenians.

**2245.** *Ion:* Tragic poet of Chios. — *Iophon:* son of Sophocles, and a poor writer of Tragedy.

**2254.** *Euphorion:* Tragic poet, son of Æschylus.

**2266.** *Erechtheus:* a lost play of Euripides, in which political affairs were discussed. Erechtheus was King of Athens.

**2304.** *Huperbolos:* an Athenian demagogue, mentioned as a lamp-seller in "The Knights" of Aristophanes.

**2305.** *Hemp-seller Eukrates:* an Athenian demagogue. He was a dealer in hemp and flax, and a proprietor of mills. When he was called upon to render up his account, he saved himself by paying a large penalty in meal, which he gave the people. Mentioned in "The Knights." — *Lusikles:* a sheep-seller, who, after the

death of Pericles, married Aspasia, and through her influence became an influential person in the state.

**2307.** *Diitriphes:* he is said to have acquired his wealth from the manufacture of willow wicker covers for wine flasks. He acted as Hipparch about the year 413. Mentioned in "The Birds" as a person with "wicker wings."

**2322.** *Cloudcuckooburg:* the town built in the air by the birds in the play of that name, in order to cut the gods off from the usual offerings from men.

**2326.** *King Tereus . . . Hoopoe Triple-Crest:* same as Epops, once King of Thrace, but turned into a hoopoe; is king of the birds in Aristophanes' play, and is depicted as having a triple crest.

**2331.** *Palaistra-tool:* mentally developed tool.

**2332.** *Amphiktuon:* Amphictyonic Council, attended by delegates from the different states of Greece, their business being to settle national difficulties.

**2337.** *Phrixos:* son of Athamas, King of Thebes, who put away his wife, Nephele. She, afraid that her children would be injured by the new wife, Ino, procured a ram with a golden fleece from Mercury. She placed the children on it, and as it vaulted through the air toward the east, the girl, Helle, fell into the sea, but Phryxos was carried to Colchis, where the fleece was preserved by the king. Aristophanes speaks of this being the theme of the chorus in the play of "Erechtheus."

**2339.** *Aggression . . . Alkibiades:* Euripides was at the time of this play an admirer of Alcibiades, and wrote a Pindaric ode for the victory of Alcibiades in the Olympic games.

**2346.** *Priapos:* a son of Bacchus, with the propensities of his father exaggerated.

**2367.** *Phales Iacchos:* names for Bacchus.

**2417.** *Kallikratidas:* a Spartan who routed the Athenian fleet.

**2419.** *Theramenes:* an Athenian philosopher and

general, one of the thirty tyrants, but not of a tyrannical disposition.

**2425.** *Demos:* the democracy. From Demos, a country district. Applied to the people because the people lived chiefly in the country, while the rulers lived in the cities. In "The Knights" Demos stands as a representative of the Athenian people.

**2448.** *Chaunoprockt:* a favorite.

**2481.** *In "Suppliants," make my Theseus*, etc.: in this play of Euripides there is an argument between Theseus and the Herald from Cadmus on the advantages and disadvantages of a democratic government.

**2496.** *Kirké:* Circe, who turned her victims into swine.

**2575.** *In my very next of plays:* "The Frogs," a description of which follows.

**2582.** *Xanthias:* the servant of Bacchus in "The Frogs," by Aristophanes.

**2602.** *Hermes:* a description of an imaginary play in which Hermes is to be parodied in his commercial aspect, "the profitable god."

**2693.** *Kinesias:* a poet notable for his leanness, as portrayed by Aristophanes in "The Birds."

**2705.** *Aristonumos, Ameipsias or Sannurion:* writers of Comedy contemporary with Aristophanes, the last two coming under his lash.

**2708.** *Rattei:* an exclamation of joy, like *Neblaretai.*

**2838.** *Lemnians, Hours:* lost plays of Aristophanes. — *Female-Playhouse-seat-Preoccupants:* probably means "The Thesmophoriazousai."

**2861.** *Kassiterides:* Tin Islands, Great Britain; so called because expeditions used to go to the coast of Cornwall for tin.

**2864.** *Zeuxis:* a celebrated Greek painter of the Attic school.

**2912.** *Your games*, etc.: athletic contests, held at stated periods, at which prizes were awarded or the victor crowned. The Olympian, in honor of the Olym-

pian Zeus, was held every five years, and the crown was of olive; the Pythian, in honor of Apollo as the destroyer of the Python, every five years (at first every nine years), the crown of laurel; the Isthmian, every three years, the crown of pine; the Nemean, every three years, the crown of parsley.

**2941.** "*Banqueters,*" "*Babylonians*": lost plays of Aristophanes.

**3017.** *Eurustheus:* the cousin of Heracles, through whom he was obliged to undertake his labors.

**3020.** "*Peace*" *the theme:* in the lost play "Kresphontes," by Euripides.

**3043.** *Kunthia:* Cynthia, a name for Diana, from Mount Cynthus, where she was born.

**3076.** *Skiadeion:* umbrella, parasol.

**3086.** *Huperbolos:* an Athenian demagogue.

**3116.** *Theoria:* a character in the "Peace," personifying games, spectacles, and sights.

**3117.** *Opora:* a character in the "Peace," personifying plenty or a fruitful autumn.

**3134.** *Kimmerian:* the abode of Somnus, the god of sleep, was in the Cimmerian country. — *Stugian:* adjective from Styx, a river of the under world.

**3165.** *Tunny:* a kind of fish.

**3189.** *Dikaiopolis:* character in "The Acharnians," in favor of peace.

**3193.** *Kimon:* the successful general against the Persians.

**3203.** *Philokleon turns Bdelukleon:* the lover of Cleon turns to be reviler of Cleon.

**3252.** *Logeion:* the stage where the actors speak.

**3308.** *Lamia-shape:* a lamia had the head of a woman and the body of a serpent.

**3309.** *Kukloboros-roaring:* roaring like the torrent Cycloborus in Attica.

**3314.** "*Do you desire to know Athenai's knack,*" etc.: it is recorded that Plato sent the "Peace" (by others said to be "The Clouds") to Dionysius of Syracuse,

telling him to read it, if he wished to see what Athenian political life was like. There is no Aristullos (Aristyllus) in either of these plays.

**3316.** *One Aristullos means myself:* in the "Ecclesiazousai," which makes fun of the Platonic idea of the equality of women, Aristyllus is mentioned, but there is nothing to indicate that Plato is meant. His mint perfume is also referred to. See this poem, line **2700;** also "Ecclesiazousai," lines 633–651 (Bohn Edition). He is mentioned, too, in the "Plutus," lines 302–325 (Bohn Edition). Browning evidently arranged the facts to suit his artistic requirements.

**3374.** *Magnes:* a writer of Comedy. He wrote a play called "The Frogs," and one called "The Birds." Aristophanes says of him, in the Parabasis of "The Knights": "Though he uttered every kind of sound, both 'Harping' and 'Fluttering,' and representing the 'Lydians,' and playing the 'Firefly,' and dyeing himself a 'frog color' . . . he was driven off the stage when he was an old man, because he was wanting in jesting."

**3375.** *Archippos:* a writer of Comedies, who took one prize. — *Hegemon:* a Thracian poet, contemporary with Aristophanes.

**3377.** *Eupolis:* the most highly praised of the contemporaries of Aristophanes, wrote a play, "Marikas" against Hyperbolus, and the "Dippers" against Alcibiades.

**3380.** "*Konnos*": the play by Ameipsias that beat "The Clouds," taking second prize, while Cratinus was first with the "Wine Flask."

**3386.** *Philonides or else Kallistratos:* Aristophanes produced the "Acharnians," "Birds," "Lysistrata" under the name of Philonides, and "Wasps" and "Frogs" under the name of Kallistrates. These poets taught the choruses, and received the state payment, and heard themselves proclaimed authors, though everybody knew they were not. Philonides is said to have had great talent as a writer of Comedy.

**3393.** *Moruchides, Euthumenes, Surakosios, Argurrhios:* Archons who made various laws in regard to Comedy.

**3400.** *Krates:* said by Aristotle to be the first Athenian Comic writer who abandoned the satiric form of Comedy, and made use of invented and general stories and fables.

**3402.** *Pherekrates:* a Comic poet who introduced living characters on the stage, but never defamed them.

**3409.** *Boy's-triumph,* etc.: Aristophanes was twenty-five when "The Acharnians" was acted.

**3476.** *Poseidon:* Neptune, god of the sea.

**3477.** *Triballos:* a deity so much of a fool that he cannot talk plainly, introduced in "The Birds."

**3533.** *Pentheus:* a king of Thebes who was unwittingly destroyed by his own mother, after having been driven mad, because he preferred the worship of Athene to that of Bacchus.

**Herakles. 2.** *Argive Amphitruon:* son of Alcæus and husband of Alcmene. — *Alkaios:* father of Amphitryon and grandfather of Heracles.

**3.** *Perseus:* son of Jupiter and Danae.

**4.** *Thebai:* capital of Bœotia, founded by Cadmus.

**5.** *Sown-ones:* the armed men who rose from the dragons' teeth sown by Cadmus. — *Ares:* Greek name of Mars.

**7.** *Kadmos:* founder of Bœotian Thebes.

**8.** *Kreon:* King of Corinth, who betrothed his daughter to Jason. — *Menoikeus:* a Theban, last of the Cadmian race who sacrificed himself for his country.

**17.** *Argos:* an ancient city, capital of Argolis in Peloponnesus.

**18.** *Kuklopian city:* Argos, according to Euripides, was built by the seven Cyclops: "These were architects who attended Prœtus when he returned out of Asia; among other works with which they adorned Greece were the walls of Mycenæ and Tiryns, which were built

of unhewn stones, so large that two mules yoked could not move the smallest of them."

**19.** *Elektruon:* a son of Perseus.

**25.** *Heré:* Juno.

**27.** *Tainaros:* a promontory of Laconia, where was the cavern whence Heracles dragged Cerberus.

**32.** *Dirké:* wife of the Theban prince Lycus.

**37.** *Euboia:* the largest island in the Ægean Sea, now Negroponte.

**57.** *Minuai:* the Argonauts, companions of Jason.

**68.** *Taphian town:* Taphiæ, islands in the Ionian Sea.

**164.** *Nemeian monster:* the lion slain by Heracles.

**196.** *Kentaur-race:* a people of Thessaly represented as half men and half horses.

**197.** *Pholoé:* a mountain in Arcadia.

**200.** *Dirphus:* a mountain of Eubœa which Heracles laid waste. — *Abantid:* Abantis was an ancient name of Eubœa.

**265.** *Helikon:* a mountain of Bœotia, sacred to Apollo and the Muses.

**389.** *Plectron:* an instrument of gold or ivory with which the ancient lute was played.

**409.** *Peneios:* a river of Thessaly.

**412.** *Mount Pelion:* a celebrated mountain of Thessaly.

**413.** *Homolé:* a mountain of Thessaly.

**420.** *Oinoé:* Œne, a small town of Argolis.

**423.** *Diomede:* a king of Thrace who fed his horses on human flesh, and was himself destroyed by Heracles.

**427.** *Hebros:* the principal river of Thrace.

**429.** *Mukenaian tyrant:* Agamemnon, King of Mycenæ.

**431.** *Amauros:* Amaurus, a river of Thessaly near the foot of Pelion.

**433.** *Kuknos:* a son of Mars by Pelopea, killed by Heracles. — *Amphanaia:* a Dorian city.

**436.** *Hesperian:* west, toward Spain.

**448.** *Maiotis:* Lake Mæotis, near the Sea of Azof.

**457.** *Lernaian snake:* the hydra slain by Heracles, who then drained the marsh of Lerna.

**461.** *Erutheia:* an island near Cadiz, where Heracles drove the oxen of Geryon.

**506.** *Pelasgia:* Greece.

**514.** *Daidalos:* mythical personage, father of Icarus.

**517.** *Oichalia:* a town of Laconia, destroyed by Heracles.

**630.** *Ismenos:* a river of Bœotia flowing through Thebes.

**676.** *Orgies:* festivals of Bacchus.

**678.** *Chthonia:* a surname of Ceres. — *Hermion:* a town of Argolis where Ceres had a famous temple.

**682.** *Theseus:* king of Athens, conqueror of the Minotaur.

**705.** *Aitna:* Etna.

**741.** *Mnemosunê:* the mother of the Muses.

**744.** *Bromios:* a surname of Bacchus.

**748.** *Delian girls:* of Delos, one of the Cyclades islands.

**750.** *Latona:* mother of Apollo and Diana.

**825.** *Acherontian harbor:* Acheron was one of the rivers of hell.

**839.** *Asopiad sisters:* daughters of the god of the river Asopus.

**842.** *Puthios:* surname of the Delphian Apollo.

**875.** *Iris:* the swift-footed messenger of the gods.

**924.** *Keres:* the daughters of Night and personified necessity of Death.

**929.** *Ototoi:* woe! alas!

**968.** *Tartaros:* Hades.

**969.** *Pallas:* one of the giants.

**1020.** *Nisos city:* port town of Megara.

**1025.** *Isthmos:* the isthmus of Corinth.

**1092.** *Argolis:* a country of Peloponnesus, now Romania.

**1095.** *Danaos:* son of Belus, king of Egypt. He had fifty daughters, who murdered the fifty sons of Egyptus.

**1100.** *Prokné:* daughter of Pandion, king of Athens, wife of Tereus, king of Thrace.

**1102.** *Itus:* son of Prokné.

**1171.** *Erinues:* the Furies.

**1177.** *Taphioi:* the Taphians, who made war against Electryon, and killed all his sons.

**1204.** *Demeter's sceptred maid:* Demeter's daughter, Proserpina.

**1266.** *Erechtheidai's town:* Athens.

**1289.** *Hundred-headed Hudra:* a dreadful monster slain by Heracles.

**1292.** *Phlegruia:* a place of Macedonia where Heracles defeated the giants.

**Conclusion. 17.** *Kottabos:* see note, line **2045.**

**61.** *He shall be hailed superior to us both:* a subtle reference to Shakespeare, who realized the combination of qualities desired by Balaustion.

**79.** *Thamuris:* a celebrated musician of Thrace. He challenged the Muses to a trial of skill. The challenge was accepted, and it was agreed that whoever conquered should have the disposal of the one defeated. Thamyris was conquered, and the Muses deprived him of his eyesight.

**83.** *Once and only once, trod stage,* etc.: it had always been the custom for the author to be also the chief actor in a piece; but Sophocles, partly from weakness of voice, partly, it has been suggested, because he thought the two functions might better be kept distinct, withdrew from the stage. He, however, appeared in his own play of "Thamyris," as playing a lyre. Nor was this the only time, as Browning says, for he also appeared as Nausicaa in his own play of the "Washing Women." A painting representing him playing on the lyre as Thamyris was, as Browning says, one of the adornments of the Pœcile (Poikilé).

**91.** *Enriched his "Rhesos" from the Blind Bard's store:* see Euripides, "Rhesus," lines 901–941 (Bohn Edition).

**107.** *Oichalia:* a country of the Peloponnesus.

**108.** *Eurutos:* king of Œchalia, who offered his daughter to a better shot than himself. Heracles won, and then killed Eurytus because he did not do as he had promised.

**109.** *Dorion:* the town where the Muses and Thamyris held their trial of skill.

**110.** *Pangaios:* a mountain of Thrace celebrated for its gold and silver mines.

**116.** *Balura:* a river of the Peloponnesus.

**194.** *Its subject — Contest for the Tragic Crown:* refers to "The Frogs," in which Euripides and Æschylus have a contest in Hades.

**230.** *Spinks:* chaffinches.

**234.** *Melpomené:* Muse of Tragedy.

**241.** *Lais the Corinthian once:* this is based on an incident told by one of the Scoliasts of the courtesan Lais.

**252.** "*What 's filth,*" etc.: this is a speech of Macareus in the lost play "Æolus." "What thing is shameful if a man's heart feels it no shame." Parodied by Aristophanes in "The Frogs."

**292.** *Iophon produced his father's play:* "Œdipus at Colonus," the play referred to, is said to have been produced by Sophocles' grandson Sophocles, the son of Ariston, and not by Iophon, as Browning says.

**299.** "*Frogs*": *produced at next Lenaia:* it was acted at the Lenæan Festival, B. C. 405. It was brought out in Philonides' name, and took the first prize. It was so much admired that it was acted again at the "Great Dionysia" in March probably of the same year.

**306.** *Castalian dew:* the fountain of Castalia at the foot of Parnassus.

**312.** *Ay, Bacchos did stand forth:* from this point to **370** is a description of "The Frogs" as Browning sees it.

**376.** *Elaphebolion-month:* stag-hunting month, March. See note, line **299.**

**377.** *Aigispotamoi:* Ægospotamoi, a small river of

the Thracian Chersonese, which empties into the Hellespont. At its mouth is the town of the same name where the Athenian fleet was completely defeated by Lysander, 405 B. C.

**383.** *Triremes:* galleys with three banks of oars.

**409.** *Bakis-prophecy:* Bacis was a soothsayer of Bœotia, who made foolish prophecies: hence a name for any foolish forecast of the future.

**446.** *Propulaia:* Propylæa, the gateway of the Acropolis.

**485.** *Elektra:* was banished by Ægisthus and given to a herdsman, where Orestes found her, and the death of Ægisthus and Clytemnestra was planned.

**505.** *Mindful of that story's close:* the lines following this give a picture rather than a description of the "Electra."

**548.** *Kommos:* a general wailing of the chorus or an actor. — *Elelеleleu:* a loud crying.

**559.** *Munuchion-month:* April, so called because sacred to Diana Mounuchia, who presided over harbors, from a harbor of that name.

**599.** *Arethousa:* the celebrated fountain of this name rises in the island of Ortygia, after a secret passage under the earth and sea from Elis, opened by Diana when Arethusa was pursued by Alpheus. The idea of the poet is, perhaps, that the cold and warm springs that flow about the grave of Euripides in Macedonia, will be born to these two sympathetic souls and rise as a warm spring of spiritual life.

**611.** "*Grant, in good sooth,*" etc.: this is based on a genuine fragment of Philonides: "If I were certain that the dead had consciousness, I would hang myself to see Euripides."